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DUNGEON®

A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® ROLEPLAYING GAME SUPPLEMENT

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CONTENTS

4 CHAOS SCAR: STICK IN THE MUD

By Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel

A group of bullywugs have claimed the muddy ruins of an ancient keep as their own. Can the PCs root them out and find out what lurks at the heart of their lair? A Chaos Scar adventure for 1st-level PCs.

15 TREED!

By Tim Eagon

An owlbear has been tormenting a tribe of elves and trapped a gnome from the Feywild. The PCs have the opportunity to find passage to the Feywild and earn the elves trust if they act quickly. A Side Trek for 7th-level PCs.

23 CHAOS SCAR: DEN OF THE SLAVE-TAKERS

By Rob Heinsoo

An gnoll outcast has taken up residence in the valley of the Chaos Scar, hoping to do a brisk business in the slave trade. But his allies have different plans for the captured slaves. A Chaos Scar adventure for 1st-level PCs.

38 GRASP OF THE MANTLED CITADEL

By Creighton Broadhurst

The Scales of War Adventure Path continues. The characters continue their quest to find a well-hidden ally of Tiamat, in a pocket domain hidden within Monadhan, the domain of betrayal. As the PCs enter the lair of a foul and corrupt enemy, they learn the full scale of Tiamat's agenda, and defeat a pair of powerful foes before the full horror of her plans can be revealed. A Scales of War adventure for 22nd-level PCs.

ON THE COVER

Illustration by Mark A. Nelson

3 EDITORIAL

82 DEITIES & DEMIGODS: RAVEN QUEEN

By Robert J. Schwalb

Learn about the groups who pursue the Raven Queen's agendas across the world and beyond.

89 EYE OF JUSTICE

Torm's followers are numerous, but some seem to have the god's sanction despite less savory practices in his name.

98 CAMPAIGN WORKSHOP: HERO BATTLE: DRIZZT

By Chris Sims & Chris Youngs

Face off against the legendary dark elf hero in this ready-to-play encounter, with several hooks for possible expansion into a full-scale adventure.

104 RULING SKILL CHALLENGES

By Mike Mearls

Mike continues to educate on the nature of skill challenges, with unique applications and examples.

109 SAVE MY GAME

By Stephen Radney-MacFarland

A DM's best friend? Stephen Radney-MacFarland, back with more advice and letters from the mailbag.

113 DUNGEONCRAFT

By James Wyatt, Andy Collins & Christopher Perkins

James discusses the latest changes to his fledgling campaign. This month: Guest columnists!

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171

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Playing in the Deep End

As long as the game's been around, D&D has been played the same way, more or less. The editions have changed, campaign settings have come and gone, and the starting level of your character might have varied, but the basics were the same.

Someone decides to run a campaign. He or she gathers up some friends to play in it. The DM creates and runs the adventures. The players respond to the DM's stimulus and follow the trail of hooks he or she leaves from adventure to adventure.

There's nothing wrong with this basic formula, at its heart. But you might have noticed lately that a number of folks on D&D Insider have taken an opportunity to propose a new way of thinking—the art of saying "Yes!" What do these things—the classic campaign archetype and the "Say Yes" strategy—have to do with one another?

Here's the thing: I think, more often than not, DMs try to shoulder too much. DMing gets arduous, and as a DM's interest in his or her own creation begins to flag, so too does that of the players. DMing should be as much fun as playing. We've all been in campaigns that have quietly eroded away as interest fizzled out. What's the answer?

In my view, it's immersion. A player who is more immersed in the campaign—the combats, the world, the story, the adventures, the characters—is likely to maintain interest. It seems obvious, but providing an immersive experience is perhaps a DM's toughest challenge, among a host of tough challenges. How do you do it? I can't say how all DMs approach this, but I know how one DM does it.

Chris Perkins, himself a proponent of the Say Yes strategy, runs our Wednesday game, and by the folks in his two campaigns, he's widely acknowledged as one of the best DMs in a building full of good DMs. His campaign worlds are ridiculously detailed, his NPCs rich and complex, and his stories full of unexpected twists. Our characters always have more goals to pursue, in more corners of the world, than your typical world leader. Chris's campaigns run for years, with mostly the same core of stable players. Some of the current crop in the two games have been playing in his campaigns for nearly ten years.

Chris's biggest contribution to our immersion level is choice. He lets us choose our own fate. His goal in giving us so many choices and decisions to make in the campaign is to give us a sense of control. We have the ability to choose our fates and thus make an impact on the world in the places where we feel the most contact. It's why, despite running two campaigns, with two different groups, in the same world, our two groups have diverged so much. The players in each group value different hooks and stories, so we pursue those to the exclusion of others. As a result, we are fully, completely immersed.

This is one of the many reasons why I'm so excited about this month's launch of the Caves of Chaos project. This is a campaign designed from ground zero to be about player choice. Our story is broad, general, and deliberately filled with holes to fill in. The players have the opportunity in this campaign, unlike many others, to really choose their fate. Do they go into a tough cave or an easier one? Do they pursue the purple glowing dungeon or the one that appears to be the source of a massive pool of mud? As they venture through, what sorts of stories draw them in? What makes them sit up and pay attention?

And what about you, DMs? What tricks and tips do you use to immerse your players? Send us your ideas!

HEROIC
1-10

Stick in the Mud

A Chaos Scar Adventure

By Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel

illustrations by Drew Baker

cartography by Sean Macdonald

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CHAOS SCAR™

"Stick in the Mud" is a short adventure for five 1st-level characters that takes place in the Chaos Scar, near the King's Wall. It pits the PCs against a tribe of evil bullywugs that have taken up residence in a long-ruined keep. The keep, once the abode of a goliath sorcerer, holds a powerful magic item, the *staff of earthen might*. The staff has been damaged and is hemorrhaging magic. This leak has ripped open a small portal to the Elemental Chaos. A tide of mud has been steadily flowing through the portal and into the cellars beneath the ruins, creating a muddy wallow that is ideal for bullywugs.

For details on the Chaos Scar and its environs, read the Chaos Scar introduction and check out the map of the entire valley.

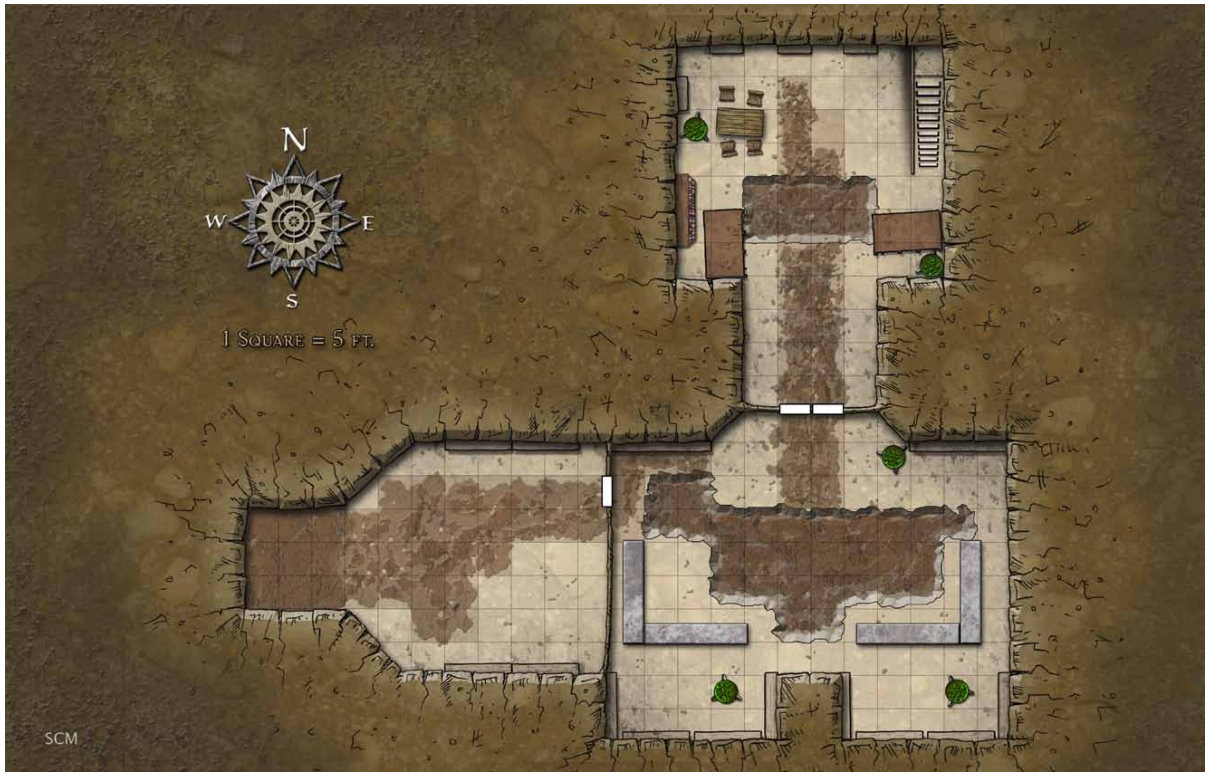
BACKGROUND

Centuries ago, a powerful goliath sorcerer named Voran Earthmane constructed a keep in the middle of a rank swamp where he could conduct his arcane research in peace. Voran conducted many experiments in the laboratory beneath his keep, mostly centered on the creation of magic items that harnessed the power of the Elemental Chaos. One of his achievements was a staff that drew strength from earth, and he called it the *staff of earthen might*.

When the great meteorite fell from the heavens and plowed the Chaos Scar, it destroyed Voran's keep, along with many other features of the terrain. The swamp drained away, leaving only a desolate, dry ruin in its wake. Only the ground floor of the keep and the laboratory beneath it escaped destruction, but even these meager remains were buried in the wake of the meteorite's fall. Voran himself escaped the obliteration of his home, but with his life's work in shambles, he collected those of his belongings he could find and departed the area for lands unknown, and his name and legacy faded into history.

A few weeks ago, a tribe of bullywugs called the Muckrakers, drawn by the evil siren song of the meteorite, uncovered the ruins of Voran Earthmane's keep and moved in. The bullywugs' poisonous and corruptive influence has hastened the ruined keep's deterioration and damaged Voran's *staff of earthen might*. The damaged staff has opened a small portal onto a sea of elemental mud in the Elemental Chaos, allowing a steady tide of the muck to fill the ruins.

Over the past few weeks, the mud has filled much of the laboratory beneath the ruins with a thick layer of sludge; creating a sticky wallow that is ideal for swamp-dwelling bullywugs. Content with their new home, the bullywugs have begun to look to the lands beyond the valley. A rich bounty of loot and murder lies just beyond the King's Wall, and the rapacious bullywugs will certainly not be able to resist such a temptation for long.



Getting the Players Involved

"Stick in the Mud" takes place in the Chaos Scar. You can use one of the hooks below to get the PCs into the valley and into the ruins of Voran Earthmane's keep. These hooks also come with a minor quest that, if completed, can net the PCs some extra experience.

Hook 1: Ancestor's Legacy

Oneus Earthmane, a local goliath sorcerer and a descendant of Voran's, believes he has discovered the location of his ancestor's ancient abode. He hires the PCs to find the ruined keep, and if possible, bring back Voran's greatest creation, the *staff of earthen might*. Oneus knows little about the valley, but can give the PCs information on Voran, his keep, and the *staff of earthen might* (see Background, above).

Quest XP: 500 XP for bringing the staff back to Oneus.

Hook 2: Warlock Ritual

A local tiefling warlock, Nyron Darkspell, needs a sample of bullywug mud for a ritual. He believes that by virtue of being surrounded by the mud of their wallow, bullywugs impart certain properties to the mud that cakes onto their skin—properties he believes will aid him in his ritual research. He knows that a tribe of the humanoids lives in the Chaos Scar, not far from the King's Wall. He hires the PCs to bring back some mud samples, offering a bounty of 30 gp each for a sample of croaker, mucker, twitcher, or mud lord mud.

Quest XP: 100 XP for harvesting the mud from at least two of the four bullywug types and bringing it back to the warlock or 500 XP for harvesting the bile from all four bullywug types.

Hook 3: Bullywug Bounty

The ruins of Voran Earthmane's keep are close enough to the King's Wall that the bullywugs have been attacking merchants and travelers. A local constable, Uther Ironhelm, hires the PCs to find and kill the marauding tribe of bullywugs, offering a 5-gp bounty on each bullywug killed. A survivor of the bullywug attacks can point the PCs in the general direction from which the bullywugs came.

Quest XP: 100 XP for killing at least half the bullywugs in the keep or 500 XP for killing them all.

Treasure Preparation

"Stick in the Mud" uses the treasure parcel system described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*®. The PCs should gain a total of four treasure parcels in this adventure. Listed below are the most likely places to find parcels and what those treasure parcels might consist of. The magic items should come from the players' wish lists; do not count the *staff of earth might +1* as part of the treasure in this adventure.

Parcel	Item
Parcel 1: The Ruins	One level 2 magic item
Parcel 2: The Study	100 gp in gems and one level 1 scroll
Parcel 3: Chamber of the Frog	100 gp and two *potions of healing*
Parcel 4: Vault of the Staff	One level 3 magic item

Getting Started

Regardless of the hook you used to get the PCs into the Chaos Scar, read or paraphrase the following when they reach the ruins of Voran Earthmane's keep:

The barren stretch of valley before you suddenly becomes a chaotic jumble of shattered masonry. In the center of the mess, on a low hill, stands the ruined foundation of a keep or tower. Only the lower section and a few walls still stand; however, enough remains intact to cast ominous shadows that could hide nearly anything.

A1: The Ruins

Encounter Level 1 (XP 526)

Setup

2 bullywug croakers (C)
2 bullywug muckers (M)
2 bullywug twitchers (T)

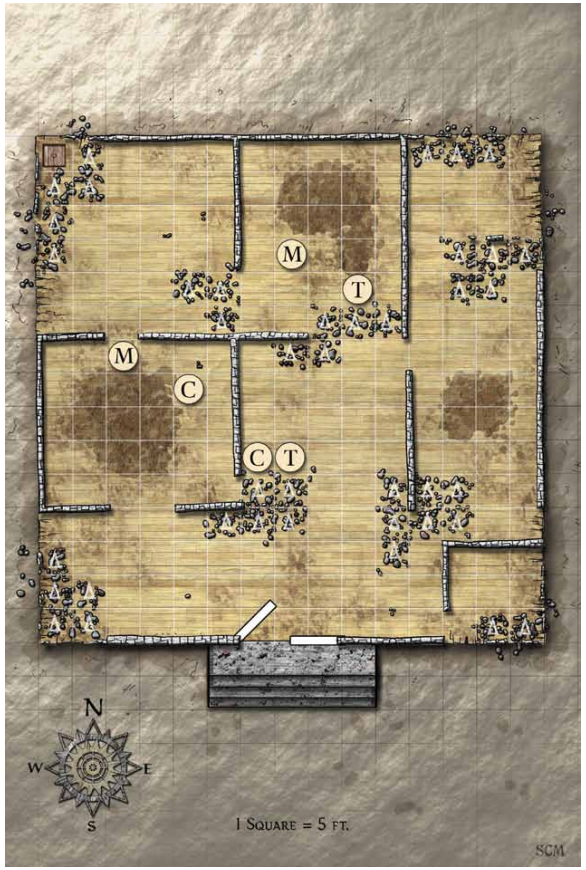
The PCs enter the ruined ground floor of the ancient keep and must find their way into the remains of the laboratory below. The PCs can enter the ruins through the intact main doors or can attempt to sneak through one of the many gaps in the walls. The bullywugs in this area are not taking great pains to hide, but the partially intact walls, rubble, and the various mud wallows in the ruins grant them some concealment from intruders.

Lazy, inattentive, and confident, the bullywugs might not notice the PCs approaching if the heroes exercise some caution and attempt to sneak up to the ruins. However, if the bullywugs catch sight of the PCs (the PCs can attempt a group Stealth check if they approach together, opposed by the bullywug twitchers' passive Perception of 13), they attempt to ambush the heroes. In the latter case, make Stealth checks for each of the bullywugs and compare them to the PCs' passive Perception checks.

When the PCs enter the ruins, read:
A soggy gloom fills the crumbling ruins of this keep. The few intact walls cast thick pools of shadows that obscure the jumbled mess of debris that covers the spongy wooden floor. A wet, boggy stench saturates the interior of the ruins, likely from the thick pits of mud that bubble up from some hidden reservoir below, creating wallows of slimy muck.

When the PCs see the bullywugs, read:
Squatting in muddy wallows amid the ruined keep are half a dozen froglike humanoids. Some of them grip crude spears and javelins, while the others are naked save for a coating of filthy mud. A chorus of deep, reverberating croaks echoes off the walls of the ruins when the creatures see you.

2 Bullywug Croakers (C)		**Level 3 Minion Brute**
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)		XP 38 each
Initiative +3	**Senses** Perception +0	
Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.		
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		
AC 14; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12		
Resist 5 poison		
Speed 6 (swamp walk), swim 4		
⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)		
+6 vs. AC; 7 damage.		
⇢ **Foul Croak** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**		
Close blast 2; +4 vs. Fortitude; 4 poison damage.		
Nature's Release ✦ **Healing**		
Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug croaker regains 3 hit points.		
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Primordial	
Skills Athletics +6		
Str 10 (+1)	**Dex** 14 (+3)	**Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 6 (-1)	**Cha** 5 (-2)



2 Bullywug Muckers (M)	Level 1 Brute
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)	XP 100 each
Initiative +2 **Senses** Perception +0	
Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.	
HP 34; **Bloodied** 17	
AC 12; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 12, **Will** 10	
Speed 6 (swamp walk), swim 4	
Spear (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** +4 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage.	
Bullywug Rush (standard; usable only in place of a melee attack when charging; recharge ⚄ ⚅) +5 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target is knocked prone. *Miss:* The bullywug mucker takes 3 damage and is knocked prone.	
Bully A bullywug mucker's attacks deal 1d6 extra damage against prone targets.	
Nature's Release ✦ **Healing** Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug mucker regains 3 hit points.	
Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Primordial	
Skills Athletics +8	
Str 16 (+3) **Dex** 14 (+2) **Wis** 10 (+0)	
Con 14 (+2) **Int** 6 (-2) **Cha** 8 (-1)	
Equipment leather armor, spear	

2 Bullywug Twitchers (T)	Level 2 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)	XP 125 each
Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +3	
Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.	
HP 34; **Bloodied** 17	
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13	
Speed 7 (swamp walk), swim 5	
Javelin (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** +6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.	
Javelin (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** Ranged 10/20; +8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.	
Spasmodic Hop (standard; encounter) ✦ **Reliable, Weapon** Marks on the bullywug twitcher end, and it shifts 4 squares before the attack: +7 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage, and the target takes a -4 penalty to attack rolls against the twitcher until the end of the twitcher's next turn.	
Nature's Release ✦ **Healing** Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug twitcher regains 4 hit points.	
Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Primordial	
Skills Athletics +8	
Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+3)	
Con 10 (+1) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 8 (+0)	
Equipment 5 javelins	

Tactics

The bullywugs have no goals in this encounter beyond killing the PCs and looting their corpses. In addition, being very chaotic and fairly greedy, they do not even bother to warn the rest of their tribe in the laboratory below the ruins if combat breaks out here.

Once combat begins, the bullywug croakers and muckers charge into melee. The bullywug muckers making use of *bullywug rush* in the opening round of combat, and the bullywug croakers fire off *foul croak* whenever they can catch two or more PCs in the blast, even if it means hitting one of the muckers.

The bullywug twitchers each move to the center of a mud wallow and support the croakers and muckers with thrown javelins. The twitchers try not to engage the PCs in melee outside of a mud wallow if possible, preferring to draw heroes into the mud where their swamp walk ability gives them an advantage. The twitchers save *spasmodic hop* to finish off a wounded PC; they can reach a PC up to 11 squares away with this attack.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Exposed to the elements, the ruins are brightly lit in most areas. However, the intact walls do cast long shadows that provide areas of dim light.

Collapsed Walls/Rubble: These piles of stone and debris are difficult terrain.

Mud Wallows: The mud here is roughly knee-deep to a Medium creature, and the wallows are considered difficult terrain. The bullywugs' swamp walk ability allows them to move through the mud wallows without hindrance.

Trapdoor: Obscured by rubble and debris, this trapdoor opens onto a stairwell leading down into the laboratory beneath the ruins. The trapdoor can be found with a DC 12 Perception check.

A2: The Study

Encounter Level 1 (XP 550)

Setup

3 bullywug muckers (M)
1 bullywug twitcher (T)
1 hidden quagmire hazard

The PCs move down a stone staircase into the first room of the ruined laboratory beneath the ruins. This room once served as a Voran Earthmane's study, although time and the deleterious presence of the bullywugs have left little but a mud-choked ruin. The mud in this room can be treacherous, and the shallow pit in the center of the room appears as just more mud-covered stone, making it hard to detect and avoid.

The bullywugs in this room are not on alert, and are unlikely to be prepared to ambush the PCs. If the PCs move quietly, they might be able to sneak up on the bullywugs and gain a surprise round. Combat in this room *does* alert the mud lord in the next room; however, the mud lord doesn't send any of the giant frogs or croakers that serve it to aid the bullywugs in the study, preferring instead to set its own ambush for the heroes.

3 Bullywug Muckers (M) **Level 1 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic) XP 100 each
Initiative +2 **Senses** Perception +0
Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.
HP 34; **Bloodied** 17
AC 12; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 12, **Will** 10
Speed 6 (swamp walk), swim 4
⊕ **Longspear** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +4 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage.
⸸ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+4 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.
⸸ **Bullywug Rush** (standard; usable only in place of a melee attack when charging; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
+5 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target is knocked prone. *Miss:* The bullywug mucker takes 3 damage and is knocked prone.
Bully
A bullywug mucker's attacks deal 1d6 extra damage against prone targets.
Nature's Release ✦ Healing
Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug mucker regains 3 hit points.
Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Primordial
Skills Athletics +8
Str 16 (+3) **Dex** 14 (+2) **Wis** 10 (+0)
Con 14 (+2) **Int** 6 (-2) **Cha** 8 (-1)
Equipment leather armor, spear

When the PCs enter this room, read:

This stone chamber is bathed in a greasy, yellow glow from a pair of smoking braziers in the northwest and southeast corners of the room. The floor is covered in a thick viscous mud that adds a swampy stink to the pungent smoke issuing from the braziers. Toppled tables, bookshelves, and other bits of furniture thrust up from the muck in various places like islands in a muddy sea. Four loathsome, froglike humanoids squat in the mud on the east end of the room, near a pair of double doors that are slightly ajar.

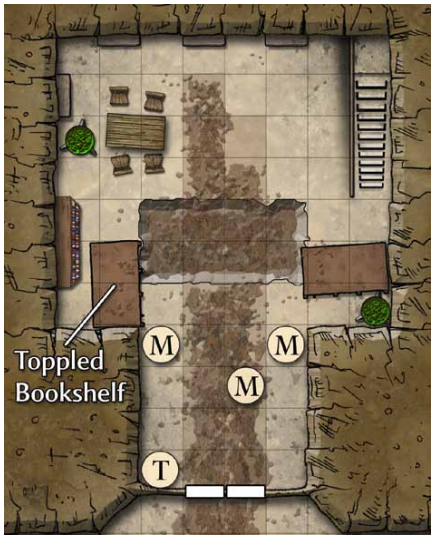
Bullywug Twitcher (T) **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic) XP 125
Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +3
Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.
HP 34; **Bloodied** 17
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13
Speed 7 (swamp walk), swim 5
⊕ **Javelin** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.
➶ **Javelin** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 10/20; +8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.
⸸ **Spasmodic Hop** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Reliable, Weapon**
Marks on the bullywug twitcher end, and it shifts 4 squares before the attack: +7 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage, and the target takes a -4 penalty to attack rolls against the twitcher until the end of the twitcher's next turn.
Nature's Release ✦ Healing
Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug twitcher regains 4 hit points.
Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Primordial
Skills Athletics +8
Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 10 (+1) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 8 (+0)
Equipment 5 javelins

Perception DC 15

You also notice that the mud in the center of the room seems much deeper and stickier than that in the rest of the chamber.

Tactics

The bullywugs here are aware of the hidden quagmire hazard in the center of the room and attempt to use it to their advantage. The bullywug twitcher begins combat by throwing javelins at the PCs, while the bullywug muckers hang back and hurl bits of debris (harmless) and taunt the PCs in Primordial. The bullywugs hope to lure the PCs into the quagmire hazard, so that the muckers can use longspears they keep nearby to stab at heroes that become stuck in the mud.



Hidden Quagmire Hazard	**Level 2 Obstacle**
Hazard	XP 125

A shallow pit filled with thick mud blends in with the muddy stone floor of the study.

Hazard: The 2 x 4 section of the muddy floor hides a shallow pit filled with thick mud.

Perception

DC 15: The character notices that the mud is much deeper in this area.

Trigger: When a creature enters or begins its turn in one of the hazard's 8 squares, the hazard attacks that creature.

Immediate Reaction **Melee**

Targets: The creature that triggered the trap.

Attack +5 vs. Reflex

Hit: The target is immobilized (save ends).

Countermeasures:

A character who makes an Athletics check (DC 11, or DC 21 without a running start) can jump over the pit.

When one or more PCs becomes immobilized in the quagmire, the bullywug muckers use *bullywug charge* to dash forward and attack a trapped PC without entering the quagmire themselves. The muckers continue to stab trapped PCs, focusing on those knocked prone by *bullywug charge*. If forced into close melee combat, the muckers drop their longspears and attack PCs with their claws.

The bullywug twitcher continues to use its javelins at range during the combat, targeting PCs trapped in the quagmire at first, and then switching to those that escape or avoid the hazard. It prefers to stay out of melee combat as long as there are two or more muckers still standing. When only one mucker remains, the twitcher uses *spasmodic hop* to enter melee, targeting a wounded PC if possible.

Features of the Area

Illumination: A pair of braziers burning a pungent fungus provides illumination in this room. The braziers provide bright illumination out to 4 squares, with spaces beyond this ranged counting as dim light.

Ceiling: The ceiling in this area is 15 feet high.

Bookshelves/Tables: A character can jump onto a toppled bookshelf or the table with a DC 20 Athletics check (remember the -2 penalty to Athletic checks imposed by the muddy squares). Anyone under the table has superior cover (-5 penalty to attack rolls against him). A character can flip over the table or topple one of the standing bookshelves with a DC 12 Strength check; both can be tipped over to provide cover.

Braziers: If tipped over, each brazier creates a burst 1 zone of greasy smoke that provides total concealment to those within it. The zone lasts until the end of the creature's turn that tipped over the brazier.

Muddy Squares: Although not deep enough to hinder movement, the elemental mud that covers these squares is treacherously slick. Any Acrobatics, Athletics, or Stealth checks made in a muddy square take a -2 penalty. Bullywugs and any creature with swamp walk do not take the penalty to skill checks.

A3: Chamber of the Frog

Encounter Level 2 (XP 676)

Setup

1 bullywug mud lord (L)
3 giant frogs (F)
2 bullywug croakers (C)

This area was once the main alchemical and magical laboratory of Voran Earthmane. The large L-shaped stone tables and tall book shelves were magically hewn from the surrounding stone, and thus have withstood the march of centuries and the residence of the bullywugs far better than those in the study. The ruins and shards of old alchemical equipment can be found scattered on the tables and the floor here.

The noise of the combat in area 2 alerts the bullywug mud lord and its giant frogs and croaker minions in this room. When the PCs enter the room, the giant frogs are in the mud wallow, while the croakers and the mud lord hide beneath the large stone tables that dominate the center of the room. Make Stealth checks for the croakers and mud lord and compare them with the PCs' passive Perception checks.

When the PCs enter this room, read:

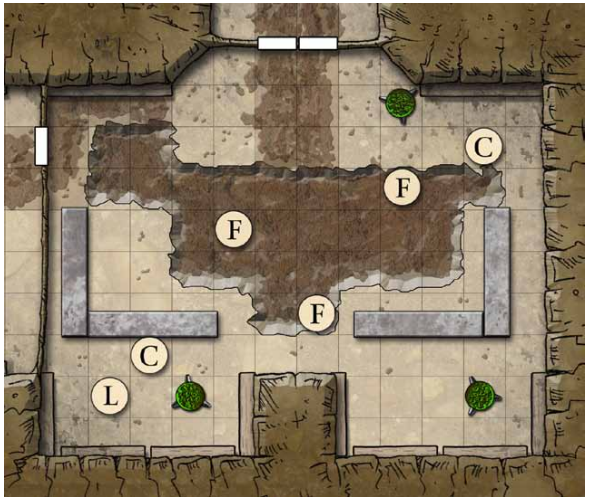
This large room is lit by more of the stinking, smoky braziers and seems to be even muddier than the previous room. A pair of large, L-shaped tables and a number of tall bookshelves, all made of stone and strewn with the broken remains of ancient alchemical equipment, mark this room as having once been some kind of laboratory. The center of the room is taken up by a shallow pit filled with thick mud, and within this filthy wallow are two of the most enormous frogs you have ever seen.

Perception

DC 10: *There is a bulky stone door, barred and shut, in the south wall. A steady river of thick mud flows from beneath the door.*

2 Bullywug Croakers (C)		**Level 3 Minion Brute**
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)		XP 38 each
Initiative +3	**Senses** Perception +0	
Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.		
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		
AC 14; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12		
Resist 5 poison		
Speed 6 (swamp walk), swim 4		
Claw (standard; at-will)		
+6 vs. AC; 7 damage.		
Foul Croak (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**		
Close blast 2; +4 vs. Fortitude; 4 poison damage.		
Nature's Release ✦ **Healing**		
Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug croaker regains 3 hit points.		
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Primordial	
Skills Athletics +6		
Str 10 (+1)	**Dex** 14 (+3)	**Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 6 (-1)	**Cha** 5 (-2)

3 Giant Frogs (F)		**Level 3 Controller**
Medium natural beast (aquatic)		XP 150 each
Initiative +5	**Senses** Perception +6	
HP 44; **Bloodied** 22		
AC 18; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 13		
Speed 4 (swamp walk), swim 6		
Bite (standard; at-will)		
+8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and a Medium or smaller target is swallowed. A swallowed target is stunned, takes ongoing 5 damage, and can't be targeted by any effect (save ends all effects). A giant frog can have only one target swallowed at a time and cannot make bite attacks as long as the swallowed target is alive.		
Grasping Tongue (minor; at-will)		
Ranged 3; +7 vs. Reflex; the target is pulled 2 squares.		
Prodigious Leap (move; at-will)		
The giant frog shifts 4 squares. It can shift through enemy squares as long as it ends its movement in an unoccupied space.		
Alignment Unaligned		**Languages** –
Skills Athletics +8, Stealth +9		
Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 17 (+4)	**Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 12 (+2)	**Int** 2 (-3)	**Cha** 6 (-1)



Bullywug Mud Lord (L)	**Level 3 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid (aquatic)	XP 150
Initiative +2	**Senses** Perception +9
Rancid Air (Poison) aura 2; each enemy that spends a healing surge within the aura is weakened until the end of its next turn.	
HP 39; **Bloodied** 19	
AC 16; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 16	
Speed 6 (swamp walk), swim 5	
⊕ **Quarterstaff** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon** +8 vs. AC; 1d8 + 1 damage.	
✧ **Electric Reflux** (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Cold, Lightning** Close blast 3; +6 (+8 with *necessary sacrifices*) vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 4 cold and lightning damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the bullywug mud lord's next turn. *Miss:* Half damage.	
✧ **Fiery Croak** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Thunder** Area burst 1 within 20; +6 (+8 with *necessary sacrifices*) vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 4 fire and thunder damage.	
Necessary Sacrifices If a bullywug mud lord includes at least one ally in the area of its area or close attacks, each of its rolls with that attack gains a +2 power bonus.	
Nature's Release ✦ **Healing** Any attacker who scores a critical hit against a bullywug mud lord regains 5 hit points.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Primordial
Skills Arcana +6, Nature +9	
Str 12 (+2)	**Dex** 14 (+2) **Wis** 16 (+4)
Con 15 (+3)	**Int** 11 (+1) **Cha** 10 (+1)
Equipment quarterstaff	

Tactics

The giant frogs attack as soon as the PCs enter the room. Each frog uses *grasping tongue* to snare the closest PC and pull him into its maw. Once a giant frog has swallowed a PC, it uses *prodigious leap* to escape any further combat; however, if cornered, it continues to attack.

The bullywug croakers and mud lord wait until the PCs engage the giant frogs before unleashing their own attacks. Directed by the mud lord, the croakers move in close and unleash their *foul croaks* en masse, attempting to catch as many PCs as possible in the blasts. The bullywug mud lord augments this assault with *fiery croak*, trying to catch at least one of the croakers or giant frogs in the burst to gain the benefit of *necessary sacrifices*.

The bullywug croakers continue to use *foul croak* until engaged in melee by a PC. The mud lord moves around the room, using the mud wallow to keep the PCs from closing with it, and using *fiery croak* each round. It saves *electric reflux* for when one or more PCs engage it in melee.

Features of the Area

Illumination: A trio of braziers burning a pungent fungus provides illumination in this room. The braziers provide bright illumination out to 4 squares, with spaces beyond this ranged counting as dim light.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 15 feet high.

Bookcases/Shelves: The large bookcases and shelving units in this room are 10 feet high and have been magically shaped directly from the surrounding stone of the walls. They cannot be toppled over, but they can be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Braziers: If tipped over, each brazier creates a burst 1 zone of greasy smoke that provides total concealment to those within it. The zone lasts until the end of the creature's turn that tipped over the brazier.

Vault Door: The large stone door in the south wall leads to the vault containing the malfunctioning *staff of earthen might*. It is not locked, but the door is heavy and the thick mud flowing beneath it makes it difficult to open. A DC 15 Strength check is required to push open the vault door.

Mud Wallow: The mud here is roughly knee-deep to a Medium creature, and the wallow is considered difficult terrain. The bullywugs' and giant frogs' swamp walk ability allows them to move through the mud wallow without hindrance.

Muddy Squares: Although not deep enough to hinder movement, the mud that covers these squares is treacherously slick. Any Acrobatics, Athletics, or Stealth checks made in a muddy square take a –2 penalty. Bullywugs and any creature with swamp walk do not take the penalty to skill checks.

Tables: A character can jump onto a table with a DC 20 Athletics check (remember the –2 penalty to Athletic checks imposed by the muddy squares). Anyone behind a table has cover (–2 penalty to attack rolls against him) and anyone beneath the table has superior cover (–5 penalty to attack rolls against him). The tables are solid stone and are bolted to the floor; they cannot be tipped over.

Area 4: Vault of the Staff

Encounter Level 3 (XP 750)

Setup

***Staff of earthen might* skill challenge** (S)
4 mud men

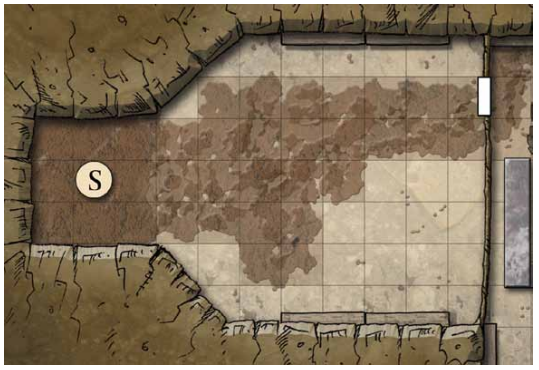
The large chamber was once a storage room where Voran kept his creations, including the *staff of earthen might*. While poking around in here, one of the bullywugs cracked the staff, opening the rift to the Elemental Chaos. The staff has been spewing mud from the Elemental Chaos for weeks now, and the area around the staff is a swirling mire of churning mud. The bullywugs avoid this room because it has recently become the lair of four mud men, minor elementals whose malleable body allowed them to squeeze through the tiny portal to the Elemental Chaos opened by the *staff of earthen might*. The mud men are within the thick mud around the staff, and are, for all intents and purposes, invisible to the PCs until they attack.

In order to retrieve the *staff of earthen might*, the PCs need to defeat the mud men and complete a skill challenge to close the portal to the Elemental Chaos.

When the PCs enter this room, read:
This stone vault is lined with shelves holding many strange devices. Some of them even appear to be intact and might be valuable. However, your most pressing concern lies at the southern end of the room, in a small alcove, where a thick, stone staff juts out from a swirling vortex of mud and spews forth a steady deluge of elemental muck.

When the mud men attack, read:
Suddenly, the roiling mud rises up in vaguely anthropomorphic shapes that flail and batter at you with lashing, muddy appendages.

4 Mud Men		**Level 2 Brute**
Small elemental magical beast (earth, water)		XP 125 each
Initiative +2	**Senses** Perception +7	
HP 43; **Bloodied** 21		
AC 14; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 13		
Immune disease, poison		
Speed 5		
ⓘ **Slam** (standard; at-will)		
+5 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage.		
Mud Ball (standard; at-will)		
Ranged 10; +3 vs. Reflex; the target is slowed (save ends). If the target is already slowed, it is instead immobilized (save ends).		
Amorphous Body (immediate reaction, when hit by a melee attack; encounter)		
The mud man shifts 3 squares.		
Relentless Assault		
The mud man gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against slowed or immobilized creatures.		
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Primordial	
Skills Stealth +7		
Str 16 (+4)	**Dex** 13 (+2)	**Wis** 13 (+2)
Con 13 (+2)	**Int** 6 (-1)	**Cha** 8 (+0)



Tactics

The mud men do not attack until a PC moves into the thick mud around the staff, at which time they rise up and attack the nearest intruder. When combat begins, two mud men attack any PCs in the thick mud around the staff with slam attacks, while the other two use *mud ball* to keep the other PCs at bay. After the first round of combat, the mud men focus their melee and ranged attacks on any creature that is slowed or immobilized to take advantage of *relentless assault*.

The mud men do not use any sophisticated tactics beyond those described above and fight to their destruction to protect their new home.

Stem the Muddy Tide **Level 2**
Skill Challenge XP 250

Your skill and knowledge are required to close the portal to Elemental Chaos.

The PCs must use their knowledge of the arcane arts and the natural world to close the portal to the Elemental Chaos that has been opened by the malfunctioning *staff of earthen might*.

Complexity

2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills

Arcana, Nature.

Arcana (DC 15, standard action, 1 success, no maximum)

With practiced gestures and muttered arcane phrases, you seek to exert your will over the malfunctioning magic item and close the portal to the Elemental Chaos.

Nature (DC 15, standard action, 1 success, no maximum)

Your knowledge and control over the natural world extend into the primordial realm of the Elemental Chaos. You exert your will over the staff of earthen might *in an attempt to seal of the portal it has opened.*

Secondary Skills

Acrobatics, Athletics.

Acrobatics (DC 10, move action, or no action if made as part of a move, no successes)

Your natural agility allows you to keep firm footing in the thick mud, making the task at hand easier to accomplish. You gain a +2 bonus to your next Arcana or Nature check made as part of this skill challenge.

Athletics (DC 10, move action, or no action if made as part of a move, no successes)

You might not be skilled in esoteric knowledge, but you can use the strength of your body to brace your companion against the slick tide of elemental mud. You grant a +2 bonus to one ally's next Arcana or Nature check made as part of this skill challenge.

Success

The PCs close the portal to the Elemental Chaos by repairing the *staff of earthen might*, which can then be retrieved.

Failure

The flow of mud from the Elemental Chaos continues. You cannot retrieve the staff until it is closed. In addition, if the flow continues unabated it could submerge the ruins in elemental mud and allow more mud men to pass through, as well as larger, more dangerous creatures from the Elemental Chaos. You can attempt the skill challenge again after a short rest.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The staff glows with a dull yellow light, providing dim light.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 15 feet high.

Muddy Squares: Although not deep enough to hinder movement, the elemental mud that covers these squares is treacherously slick. Any Acrobatics, Athletics, or Stealth checks made in a muddy square take a –2 penalty. Bullywugs and any creatures with swamp walk do not take the penalty to skill checks.

Shelves: The large shelving units in this room are 10 feet high, have been magically shaped directly from the surrounding stone of the walls, and cannot be toppled over. However, they can be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Thick Mud: The squares around the staff are filled with thick mud and are challenging terrain. A skill check is not required to move into a square with thick mud; however, it requires a DC 10 Athletics check to move *out* of a square with thick mud; a failed check means the PC is immobilized (save ends).

Treasure: If repaired and retrieved, the staff is a *staff of earthen might +1*.

Appendix: New Magic Item

Staff of Earthen Might **Level 3+**

This staff channels the power of the earth to add strength to your limbs and weight to your blows.

Lvl 3	+1	680 gp	Lvl 18	+4	85,000 gp
Lvl 8	+2	3,400 gp	Lvl 23	+5	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	+3	17,000 gp	Lvl 28	+6	2,125,000 gp

Implement (Staff)

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d6 damage per plus and the target is knocked prone.

Property: When you are standing on a surface of stone or earth, you gain a +2 item bonus to Athletics checks and Strength ability checks (but not Strength-based attacks).

Power (Daily): Free Action: Use this power when an attack with this implement hits. The target feels as if its weight has tripled, and it is slowed until the end of your next turn.

About the Author

Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel is a staff writer and editor for Goodman Games, a freelance writer and RPG designer, and the editor-in-chief of the 4E magazine *Level Up*. He has been a professional game designer since 2005, and his recent author credits include *Blackdirge's Dungeon Denizens*, *Critter Cache: Daemons*, and *Hero's Handbook: Tiefling*. Aeryn currently lives in Modesto, California with his wife Melissa, a non-gamer whose tolerance for her husband's geekery borders on the supernatural.

HEROIC
1–10

Treed!

A Side Trek for 7th-Level Characters

By Tim Eagon

illustrations by Stephen Crowe ✦ cartography by Kyle S. Hunter

The Graythicket tribe of elves has long called the woodlands that bear their name their home. They have also always known that the tempermental portal to the Feywild in their woods might someday prove problematic. But despite their knowledge and vigilance, trouble has arrived from their ancient home, in the form of an angry, vicious owlbear.

"Treed!" is a D&D Side Trek for five characters of 7th level. It is easily adaptable to any campaign's needs. While it takes place in a barren stretch of land near a forest, you can relocate the encounter to any area appropriate to your campaign.

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Adventure Background

Not long ago, a particularly vicious owlbear blundered through a fey crossing into the world. Bewildered by its abrupt transposition and unfamiliar with its new surroundings, the owlbear went on a deadly rampage through the woodlands nearby, driving out all other predators before claiming a barren stretch of land on the edge of the forest as its own. Despite their best efforts, a nearby group of elves known as the Graythicket tribe, also traumatized by the owlbear, were unable to drive it out.

Despite a general respect for all life, the Graythickets have decided that it would be best if the owlbear was destroyed. Unwilling to risk any more of their warriors, several of whom have been killed or injured by the creature, they spread the word that they in need of aid to hunt down the owlbear. The first group to make the attempt was a band of adventurers who called themselves the Shevverim. One of their number was a Graythicket elf who had left to seek his fortune in the wider world. On hearing of his tribe's troubles, he returned to lend his aid accompanied by some loyal allies. Unfortunately, the angry owlbear proved too canny a foe, and two of the adventurers became its next meal. The rest refused to consider fighting the beast again and left. The elf adventurer, Luthan, remained behind, and now travels to surrounding communities in search of other adventurers who will rid his tribe of the menace. The ravenous owlbear has begun hunting further afield from its claimed land, causing the Graythicket tribe no end of problems.

The first takers Luthan found were a group of roguish kenku mercenaries. Led by a scruffy scoundrel named Atatakk, the kenku were curiously eager to pursue the owlbear. But their enthusiasm apparently didn't serve them well against the beast, as they never returned. Luthan scouted the area after they failed to report back, and saw only some scattered black feathers near the owlbear's lair. No other sign of the kenku remained.

Discouraged, Luthan redoubled his efforts, and succeeded in finding three more groups willing to engage the owlbear, whose legend had grown among the local communities. But each of the groups Luthan sent failed to return. Further scouting missions didn't even turn up sign of their clothes or belongings.

The Mystery

The truth of the matter is that the kenku are thieves from a larger flock from a nearby city. Tasked with finding a way to extort, steal, or cheat the local folk out of any coin they could, the kenku traveled from town to town until they met Luthan. They never had any intention of fighting the owlbear, but Atatakk saw an opportunity. After getting Luthan's directions to the owlbear's cave, they set off to scout the area. Atatakk had a few of his band sneak into the area when the owlbear was asleep and scatter some feathers on the ground. Then the kenku circled around into the woods nearby, where Atatakk could observe the comings and goings of the beast, and they waited.

Just a few days later, they saw Luthan come by and scout the area, note the feathers, and leave in dejection. The kenku continued to wait. Less than a week after that, a band of adventurers came to fight the owlbear once more. It defeated them easily. After the owlbear, replete on fresh adventurers, had dozed off, Atatakk and his band stole down silently and collected the fallen adventurers' gear and money.

More adventurers followed in later days. Sometimes, if the owlbear was hard pressed, Atatakk would order his kenku into the fray to aid it. They always caught the adventurers by surprise and turned the tide, then fled before the beast could turn on them. Later, they would return and collect the treasure from the battle. The bulk of their loot has been sent back to their home flock in the city. But Atatakk has kept a few choice bits for himself...

Unknown to the Graythicket tribe or Luthan, another denizen of the Feywild recently wandered through the portal: a gnome arcanist by the name of Orva. A researcher at heart, she was disoriented at first, but quickly realized the portal she'd passed through had closed behind her. She set off in search of aid, but found the owlbear's territory instead. The enraged beast caught the scent of its home plane and flew into a rage. It chased the panicked gnome, wounding her badly before she managed to find refuge in the branches of a nearby tree on the edge of the owlbear's territory.

Orva has attempted to leave the tree twice, but both times, by chance, the owlbear was nearby and chased her. Now, her strength waning, she has succumbed to paranoia and despair, and doesn't know what to do. She has nearly run out of food, despite rationing, and is now in danger of starving to death.

Involving the PCs

The PCs have come to one of the small settlements near the Graythicket lands and encounter Luthan, who still seeks the aid of adventurers. If the plight of the Graythicket elves isn't enough of a lure to get the PCs interested, consider one of the following hooks:

Portal to the Feywild: The PCs might be in the area in search of a portal to the Feywild. If they ask around, they will be directed to Luthan, as the Graythicket elves are the known experts on their forest's portal. Luthan knows of the portal and will share its location with the PCs, provided they help him with the "owlbear situation."

Treasure of the Fallen: Luthan could attempt to sway the heroes by explaining that many other adventurers have gone to face the owlbear and failed, and the heroes would be legends (albeit only locally) were they to triumph. If that still doesn't seal the deal, he points out that all those dead adventurers have surely left quite a trove behind, which is likely to be found in the owlbear's lair.

Wanted: One Owlbear Head: Finally, if all else fails, Luthan will offer the PCs 500 gp from the Graythicket tribe's meager savings if the PCs bring him the head of the owlbear.

Starting the Adventure

The PCs have arrived in the community of Havermere. (If you don't want to add a new settlement, have Luthan wander in wherever the PCs are currently staying. He's on the move constantly, making him easy to drop into any ongoing campaign.) This small town is protected by a wooden palisade and features a fairly healthy economy. Trade with other towns is brisk, but the residents have grown uneasy lately thanks to Luthan's near-frantic attempts to find aid for his tribe. He spends the bulk of his day in Havermere's market square, then at dusk, heads to the Dizzy Monk, one of the town's pubs. In either place, he attempts to interview every newcomer. As Havermere sits near a trade crossroads, that means a fair number of merchants and members of their caravans pass through its gates.

Luthan has become something of a local nuisance, and he will often pester visitors beyond their patience. He's been tossed out of all the other inns and taverns in town. Only the Dizzy Monk remains open to him.

When the PCs arrive in Havermere, it could be for any number of reasons, depending on your campaign. If they seek out a good tavern, have a local direct them deliberately to the Dizzy Monk if the heroes aren't bothering to conceal their occupations. At this point, everyone wants the owlbear dead so Luthan will shut up and go home. New adventurers in town mean new potential hires for the weary, irritating elf.

Luthan has grown desperate, as his tribe's hunting grows more difficult with each passing day. When the PCs meet him, he is wan and pale, with dark circles under his eyes. Once a ranger, his equipment seems ill cared for, although he still wears hide armor and carries his longbow everywhere. His voice is deep, slow, and earnest, as he tries to persuade adventurers to aid his cause. He doesn't hesitate to share all that he knows from the Adventure Background. He knows nothing from The Mystery section, above.

Once the heroes have agreed to aid Luthan, proceed to encounter T1 after reading the General Details, below.

General Details

The owlbear's territory is mostly barren and lifeless rock fields. It's bordered to the south by some heavy forest, now the edge of the Graythicket lands. The tree holding Orva is on this border to the southeast, and is directly in the PCs' path when they approach.

Treasure

The PCs should gain two parcels of treasure by the end of the adventure. One of the parcels should be coin and goods, the other should be a magic item recovered from Atatakk's stash. This Side Trek grants parcel 4 and parcel 8 from the 7th-level list (*Dungeon Master's Guide*®, page 127). Both parcels are found in encounter T2. Modify the treasure as needed for your party's level.

T1. Desperation

As you emerge from the Graythicket forest, the change in the landscape is startling as the trees end suddenly. The most noticeable feature of this barren landscape is its utter lack of life. The only things rising from its parched soil are the desiccated remnants of several dead trees withered by the unforgiving sunlight. Otherwise, only a few piles of bleached stones provide what little shelter is available.

Orva's tree is about 20 feet west of the PCs' position as they emerge from the forest. If they aren't approaching stealthily, she hears them automatically and begins calling for help in both Common and Elven. Proceed to the roleplaying encounter.

Roleplaying Encounter: T1. Desperation (page 19).

T2. Hunter Becomes the Hunted

After the PCs have had a chance to interact with Orva for a bit, the owlbear catches wind of them and it races to attack. Meanwhile, Atatakk has his kenku warriors positioned strategically at a distance around the owlbear's territory. Atatakk knows about Orva, but hasn't take steps to eliminate her. He's patient, and he thinks the owlbear will get her eventually.

But even so, he has a spy watching her tree, who has reported back to Atatakk as soon as the PCs showed up. The kenku thief is even now gathering his troops to observe (and possibly contribute to) the fight he knows is inevitable. After all, he's seen it before.

Tactical Encounter: T2. Hunter Becomes the Hunted (page 20).

CONCLUSION

Once the PCs have dealt with the owlbear, they can easily find Luthan back in Havermere to collect their reward, if they negotiated one. Upon searching Atatakk, they find the collected loot he saved for himself (see Treasure on page 17). Orva will come down from her tree is presented with the head of the owlbear. She is weak and will happily take any food or water that's offered. She's particularly incensed that the kenku were here, clearly knew she was in the tree, and offered no assistance. She makes plans to return to the Feywild portal as soon as possible and determine a way to activate it to travel home.

Expanding the Adventure

This Side Trek can serve as a springboard for several larger, more ambitious adventures. Some ideas might include the following hooks.

Orva and the Feywild

There's a portal to the Feywild nearby, and it seems to be operating intermittently, or perhaps deliberately but at the whim of some other agent. Orva knows where the portal is, as does Luthan, and both are willing to show the PCs to its location. At your discretion, Orva knows how to activate the portal, enabling the PCs to return with her. Orva could be a representative of a gnome community of the Feywild, or a member of an arcane study group, either of which might need the help of able heroes. For example, perhaps Orva was out wandering the forest of the Feywild in search of the lost ruins of an eladrin city, long since destroyed by incursions from the Feydark. The city is said to hold important knowledge that she needs to defend the arcane society to which she belongs from harm.

Flock on the Prowl

Atatakk has been sending the majority of the loot gathered from the adventurers eaten by the owlbear back to his flock in a nearby city. When the supply stops, more kenku are sent to investigate, and they're likely to be displeased by the slaughter of their companions. A vendetta is sworn by the vengeful kenku, who wield a substantive amount of power in this region, and assassins routinely show up to attack the PCs at the worst times. (After all, Atatakk isn't the only opportunistic kenku in his flock.) The PCs can trace their attackers back to the city, only to find that the kenku are major players in the underworld, and getting the bounty lifted from their heads might require them to take down an extensive criminal organization.

Prisoner!

The last time the owlbear destroyed a band of would-be hunters, one of the adventurers in the party actually managed to crawl away before falling unconscious from her wounds. The kenku found the adventurer, stabilized the unfortunate soul, and have been keeping her prisoner. Atatakk hasn't quite figured out what to do with her yet, although he's toying with the idea of a ransom. He just doesn't know who to ransom her to. When the kenku have been defeated, the PCs find the prisoner, bound and gagged in the kenku encampment. Who this prisoner is can be up to you, but perhaps she's a member of a powerful merchant house that just happens to be look for some adventurers.

T1. Desperation

Roleplaying Encounter
Encounter Level 6

Running This Encounter

This roleplaying encounter begins when the characters emerge from the Graythicket Woods.

Perception DC 8
You hear a woman's voice—weakened, but still with enough volume to carry—from a small cluster of trees roughly 20 feet west of your position. Calling out first in Elven, then in Common, you hear the voice cry out, "Please help me! I've been in this tree for days, and I don't know if I can make it much longer! Please!"

If the PCs investigate, they can easily see Orva, filthy and disheveled, hiding in the branches of a tree on the edge of the forest.

When the PCs approach, read the following:
High in a tree on the edge of this desolate area, you see a small woman—a gnome—clutching desperately to some of the smallest branches at the very top of the tree. She looks thin, gaunt, and frightened, and she peers at you with both fear and hope.

Orva is malnourished, having run out of food almost two days ago. She has been conserving her water, but is also dehydrated. She has barely slept since she climbed the tree, out of fear of the owlbear and falling out and hurting herself in such a manner that she would be helpless to escape from the owlbear should it come upon her. In addition, the owlbear hunts whenever it's awake, and as it hunts, it emits piercing screeches that echo across the land. The PCs hear just such a screech as they arrive at the base of Orva's tree. During the course of this roleplaying encounter, the owlbear screeches periodically, sometimes closer, sometimes further away.

As a result of all this, Orva has developed a healthy case of paranoia about the owlbear she believes is stalking her, waiting to pounce as soon as she descends. She is relieved to see any potentially friendly faces, but her fear is both overwhelming and debilitating. As the PCs begin to interact with Orva, they can make Insight checks.

Insight DC 14
The PCs realize that Orva is extremely afraid, and it quickly becomes apparent that the source of her fear is the owlbear, which she will quickly point out lairs in the immediate area.

Insight DC 19
Orva is not simply afraid. She is paralyzed with fear. Her eyes dart back and forth across the landscape, constantly looking for signs of her tormentor. She refuses steadfastly to come down from the tree until she's seen the owlbear's corpse, or at least proof of its death, and she means it. Her fear is so overpowering, she would rather starve to death than descend from her position.

"No! No! I will not come down! Not until that thing is dead. I know it's out there. I can smell it! Can't you? With its horrid eyes! I know it's there, waiting for me!"

The PCs can also make Perception checks as they interact with Orva.

Perception DC 14
This gnome wears clothing unlike anything you've seen in this region. In addition, her Common is graced with an accent you've heard before, from folk who call the Feywild their home.

What Orva Knows

Orva can relate the following:

✦ The owlbear lairs nearby. In fact, she's not sure why it hasn't jumped out to attack yet. This only further cements her belief that the owlbear is after her, personally. She claims the owlbear must have "developed a taste for gnome."
✦ Orva passed through a portal from her home in the Feywild several days ago. She's an arcanist by trade, and quickly realized what had happened. Unfortunately, she couldn't find her way back to the portal, and instead wandered into the owlbear's territory. She's replayed her route in her mind several times, and she thinks she knows the way back to the portal from here now, however.

A few things also seem to be bothering Orva. With a little prodding, the PCs can learn some additional information.

Insight (DC 19): *I saw a kenku skulking along the forest edge yesterday. I was half asleep, and by the time I realized what I was seeing, he was gone. I called out, but he didn't return. I might have imagined the whole thing...*

Diplomacy (DC 19): *I can show you the way to the portal from here, if you kill that beast and show me its head.*

Finally, feel free to make Orva a source of other information, depending on the needs of your campaign. She can be an excellent resource for questions about arcane topics or the Feywild, especially, and could become an ally of the PCs who can bridge both worlds.

T2. The Hunter Becomes the Hunted

Encounter Level 7 (XP 1700)

Setup

Atatakk, kenku wing mage (A)
Cockatrice (C)
Owlbear (O)
4 kenku warriors (K)

Shortly after the PCs finish speaking with Orva, the fiercely territorial owlbear senses their presence and rushes out from its dusty nest to confront them. While hunting, it incessantly emits a terrifying, piercing screech that echoes across the desolate landscape.

The kenku keep a watch around the perimeter of the owlbear's territory, and they send word to Atatakk as soon as the heroes enter the area. The kenku then regroup, ready to observe the fight or aid the owlbear as necessary.

Atatakk, the kenku leader, is flush with confidence. Just this morning, his flock somehow captured a wandering cockatrice (though at the cost of his group's remaining kenku sneak). The unfortunate creature strains at a long leash, squawking madly and flapping its stubby wings in futile protest, but it has yet to turn on its new masters.

The kenku wait until the owlbear has attacked the PCs before striking; do not place them on the map until they join the fight in the second round, as indicated on the shaded section of the map.

When the owlbear comes into view, read:
Unfortunately, you now discover the source of the awful racket that has been plaguing you for the last few minutes. A massive owlbear comes into view several steps ahead of you, crawling slowly over a pile of rubble. It scrapes its razor-sharp talons against the rocks, producing a dreadful, high-pitched sound that immediately puts you on edge. The owlbear rears up on its hind legs and bellows angrily; in a few moments, its full-throated roar reaches an awful, shrieking crescendo. After its display of dominance, you know that an attack is imminent.

Perception DC 14 (after the first round of battle):
Over the din of battle, you hear a strange sound, almost like a mixture of hissing and clucking. It almost sounds like an angry chicken is lurking behind some nearby rocks.

Tactics

The owlbear immediately attacks the nearest PC with *double attack*; if it manages to grab its target, it eagerly spends its action point to bite its captive prey. It is not a subtle adversary and employs the same basic strategy described above round after round. Once the kenku join the fray, the owlbear selects its target based solely on whoever inflicted the most damage upon it the previous round.

The kenku desire to approach the brewing melee unobserved, but the obstinate cockatrice makes that a more difficult task than they anticipated. The kenku enter the initiative count after the second round of combat, gaining combat advantage until the beginning of their next turn against any target who failed to notice their approach (the enraged owlbear is too preoccupied and automatically fails its Perception check). Atatakk knows generalities about the PCs (number, race, and so on), but nothing specific (his spies aren't clever enough to try and determine the PCs' classes, for example). Atatakk directs the cockatrice at the heroes, but each round on its initiative, roll 1d6. On a roll of 1 or 2, it attacks the closest enemy to it, friend or foe, rather than automatically targeting one of the PCs.

The kenku warriors hurl their daggers at any target that they have combat advantage against and then try to maneuver to set up flanking opportunities. If close-quarters fighting proves too risky, they turn to hit-and-run tactics, using their *fluttering attack* power to stay constantly on the move.

Atatakk first uses *wings of the flock* so he can safely stay out of the reach of the owlbear (and the PCs), and then attacks from range with his spells, occasionally risking a *hurricane blast* if it recharges. He is not as haphazard as his flockmates; however, he does not care overmuch if he accidentally hits his fellow kenku with his attacks.

The temperamental owlbear fights to the death and relentlessly pursues fleeing creatures to the edge of its territory. The kenku are much less tenacious and try to retreat if more than half their number are killed or incapacitated. If the kenku warrior holding the cockatrice is killed, the cockatrice fights only until bloodied, then it flees, wanting nothing more than to find its burrow and hide there.

Atatakk, Kenku Wing Mage (A) Level 5 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid XP 200

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +3; low-light vision
HP 50; **Bloodied** 25
AC 17; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 18
Speed 6

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+9 vs. AC; 1d4+3 damage.

Murder of Crows (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force, Implement**
Ranged 20; +10 vs. Reflex; 1d6+4 force damage, and the target grants combat advantage to the kenku wing mage (save ends).

Hurricane Blast (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Force, Implement**
Close blast 3; +8 vs. Fortitude; 1d6+6 force damage, and the kenku wing mage slides the target 3 squares.

Death Flock (standard; encounter) ✦ **Force, Implement**
Area burst 1 within 20; +8 vs. Reflex; 1d6+6 force damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Flock Effect
A kenku wing mage gains a +3 bonus instead of +2 while flanking, and it grants a +3 bonus instead of +2 while aiding another.

Mimicry
A kenku wing mage can mimic sounds and voices. A successful Insight check opposed by the wing mage's Bluff check allows a listener to determine that the effect is faked.

Wings of the Flock (minor; encounter) ✦ **Force**
The kenku wing mage gains fly 6 (hover; altitude limit 4) until the end of the encounter.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +8
Str 9 (+1) **Dex** 13 (+3) **Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 18 (+6 **Cha** 15 (+4)
Equipment robes, dagger, implement, orb

4 Kenku Warriors (K) Level 3 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid XP 150

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +3; low-light vision
HP 44; **Bloodied** 22
AC 17; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14
Speed 6

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+8 vs. AC; 1d4+6 damage.

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 5/10; +8 vs. AC; 1d4+6 damage.

Fluttering Attack (standard; at-will)
The kenku warrior shifts 4 squares and makes a basic attack during that movement.

Combat Advantage
A kenku warrior deals 1d6 extra damage on melee attacks against any target granting combat advantage to it.

Flock Effect
A kenku warrior gains a +3 bonus instead of +2 while flanking, and it grants a +3 bonus instead of +2 while aiding another.

Mimicry
A kenku warrior can mimic sounds and voices. A successful Insight check opposed by the warrior's Bluff check allows a listener to determine that the effect is faked.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 12 (+2) **Int** 9 (0) **Cha** 11 (+1)
Equipment 6 daggers, leather armor

Cockatrice (C) Level 5 Skirmisher
Small natural beast XP 200

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +2; low-light vision
HP 63; **Bloodied** 31
AC 19; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 15
Immune petrification
Speed 4, fly 6 (clumsy)

Bite (standard, at-will)
+10 vs. AC; 1d6+3 damage, and the cockatrice makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack*: +8 vs. Fortitude; the target is slowed (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends). *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target is petrified.

Buffeting Wings (Immediate interrupt, when an enemy moves adjacent to the cockatrice, recharge ⚄ ⚄ ⚅)
The cockatrice uses its bite against the triggering enemy and then shifts 3 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Skills Stealth +11
Str 9 (+1) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 11 (+2)
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 2 (-2) **Cha** 4 (-1)

Owlbear (O) Level 8 Elite Brute
Large fey beast XP 700

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +12; low-light vision
HP 212; **Bloodied** 106
AC 22; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 20
Saving Throws +2
Speed 7
Action Points 1

Claw (standard, at-will)
Reach 2; +12 vs. AC; 2d6+5 damage.

Double Attack (standard, at-will)
The owlbear makes two claw attacks. If both claws hit the same target, the target is grabbed (until escape).

Bite standard, at-will)
Grabbed target only; automatic hit; 4d8+5 damage.

Stunning Screech (immediate reaction, when first bloodied, encounter)
Close burst 1; +10 vs. Fortitude; the target is stunned (save ends).

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 14 (+6) **Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 16 (+7) **Int** 2 (0) **Cha** 10 (+4)

Development

Kenku Prisoners: If the PCs manage to subdue any of the kenku, they find that the craven humanoids are willing to spill their guts with little prompting. Unfortunately, other than a self-pitying recounting of recent events, they know little information of practical use, but that will not stop them from making up what they think the PCs want to hear. The kenku can be part of a much larger criminal organization, should you desire. If that's the case, they try to bluster and bluff that their powerful kin will want them freed, or they could be consequences. A DC 10 Insight check reveals that this is partly true (they are part of such an organization) and partly false (the organization frowns on members who allow themselves to get captured and can't free themselves).

If the PCs free the kenku, they flee home to the city, where they report their capture and release, and possibly earn the heroes a new enemy.

Tracking the Cockatrice: If the cockatrice escapes after petrifying one of the PCs, the survivors may want to track it down so they can create a poultice from its feathers that reverses the effect (a DC 17 Nature check reveals this property). Tracking the bird is a level 7 skill challenge with a complexity of 1, requiring four successes before three failures (primary skills are Nature, Perception, and Stealth). The solitary cockatrice nests in a small cleft in the nearby ridge. If the PCs succeed at the skill challenge, they find the cockatrice scratching at the ground, looking for food, but if they fail, the irate cockatrice leaps out from its hiding place, attacking with surprise.

When feathers freshly plucked from a cockatrice are mixed with mud, it creates a poultice that can reverse petrification when spread on an affected creature within 24 hours. It requires a DC 20 Heal check and 30 minutes of preparation to create the poultice; one cockatrice provides enough feathers to create a single application.

Features of the Area

Dead Trees: A creature standing in the same square as a dead tree gains cover. If a dead tree is in the area of a burst or blast attack that inflicts fire or lightning damage (or if it is specifically targeted by such a power), it bursts into flames (close burst 1, +8 vs. Reflex, 2d6 fire damage) and burns until the end of the encounter. Creatures entering a square containing a burning tree, or who begin their turn there, take 2d6 fire damage.

Gravel Field: Patches of gravel cover the owlbear's territory; each patch counts as difficult terrain.

Rubble: The piles of rubble that dot the landscape can provide cover to a crouching, Medium-sized or smaller creature. Each pile counts as difficult terrain.

Taut Leash: The cockatrice continually struggles against its rope leash, keeping it extremely taut and constantly swaying, which poses a hazard to nearby combatants. On the map, draw a line up to 4 squares long from the center of the cockatrice's square to the center of the square occupied by the kenku warrior tethered to it (determine the kenku controlling the cockatrice at the beginning of the combat). Any creature that willingly moves through a space containing the line is subject to the following attack: +10 vs. Reflex, targets hit by the attack are knocked prone and their movement ends. The rope continues to make the attack until both the cockatrice and kenku warrior are killed, the cockatrice breaks free, or the PCs sever the rope (AC 10, Reflex 10, Fortitude 5, 3 hit points).

About the Author

"Oasis of the Golden Peacock" was **Tim Eagon**'s first published RPG work, in *Dungeon* #169. "Treed!" was originally an encounter included as part of that adventure, but the owlbear seemed to recquire a life (and an adventure) all its own.

A Chaos Scar Adventure

By Rob Heinsoo

Den of the Slavetakers

illustrations by Drew Baker ✦ cartography by Sean Macdonald

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"Den of the Slavetakers" is a short adventure for five 1st level characters that takes place in the Chaos Scar. A slavetaking operation run by a one-armed gnoll turns out to have a truly sinister purpose: victim-gathering for death rituals performed by an underground cult of Torog. The priest of the temple on the far side of the cavern, a female halfling named Morgana, uses a small shard of the meteor to draw mutated homunculus servants out of the valley's rock. Not content with homunculus servants, she is now using gnoll magic borrowed from her henchman to turn halfling victims into flawed but deadly witherlings. In the mushroom-choked depths of the central chamber, myconids prepare for an assault on the temple to take the meteorite from whoever is left standing after the PCs interrupt the cultists' rituals.

For details on the Chaos Scar and its environs, read the Chaos Scar introduction and check out the map of the entire valley.

Background

The pivotal figure in the secret Torog cult is a female halfling magician who took the name Morgana when she entered Torog's service. Having come into possession of a shard from the meteor, Morgana took over a previously occupied underground lair and set it up as a well-defended underground temple where she could pursue experiments to learn the extent of the shard's powers.

Morgana has two main lieutenants: a human torturer named Scalpel and a one-armed elderly gnoll known as the Hand of Torog. Scalpel, a heavily muscled and tattooed degenerate who sleeps hanging from hooks in his cell in the temple, gets his name from his favorite tool. The Hand of Torog fled a chief's challenge in his pack instead of fighting to the death. Faith in Torog gave him new purpose, and Morgana gave him a home on the front line of her defenses. The Hand doesn't have the social perspective to understand that his name is more sardonic wit than an honorific.

As the adventure begins, the Hand of Torog and cultist accomplices have succeeded in taking six new slaves, two male humans and four halflings, two male and two female. Seven human Torog worshipers have preceded the PCs into the area, arriving for a ritual in which Morgana has promised great pain, great pleasure, and magic that draws on the power of the Chaos Shard to create more homunculus and undead servitors for the temple.

Beneath the temple in a great mushroom chamber, a circle of myconids drawn toward the Chaos Shard's energies are secretly creating a great fungal tower that will enable them to climb to the top of the cavern and take Morgana's shard as their own. Although unaware of the myconid's plans, Morgana is a dedicated survivor with an elaborate escape plan. The PCs may end up facing the myconids even if Morgana escapes with the shard.

Getting the Players Involved

"Den of the Slavetakers" takes place in the Chaos Scar. Use one of the hooks below to get the PCs into the valley and on the slavetakers' trail. These hooks also come with a minor quest that can provide the PCs with some extra experience.

Hook 1: A Family Kidnapping

Four members of Jangi Blackstream's family were kidnapped last week, in two separate incidents. Jangi, a halfling trader who operates near the valley, is desperate to recover his kin: Nebin, Wayan, Shaena, and Lani. Survivors of one of the kidnappings, which turned into a short and almost lethal brawl, reported that the Blackstream cousins were taken by flying blue demons and a one-armed gnoll. Jangi has no solid information on what has happened to his relatives, but he has a nasty hunch. Some years ago, another family member discarded her old name (Nedda Blackstream), renamed herself Morgana, and moved into the Chaos Scar, if such a thing can be believed. Jangi thinks that Nedda/Morgana's vindictive streak might explain an otherwise inexplicable assault on the Blackstream family, and he knows she is somewhere in the area of the valley that contains the temple. Jangi will pay 50 gp and provide a 25% discount on two 1st- through 5th-level magic items if the PCs can follow-up on his hunch.

Quest XP: 100 XP for finding Morgana, 100 XP for finding the missing Blackstreams, and another 300 XP for rescuing one or more halflings alive.

Hook 2: Smite the King that Crawls

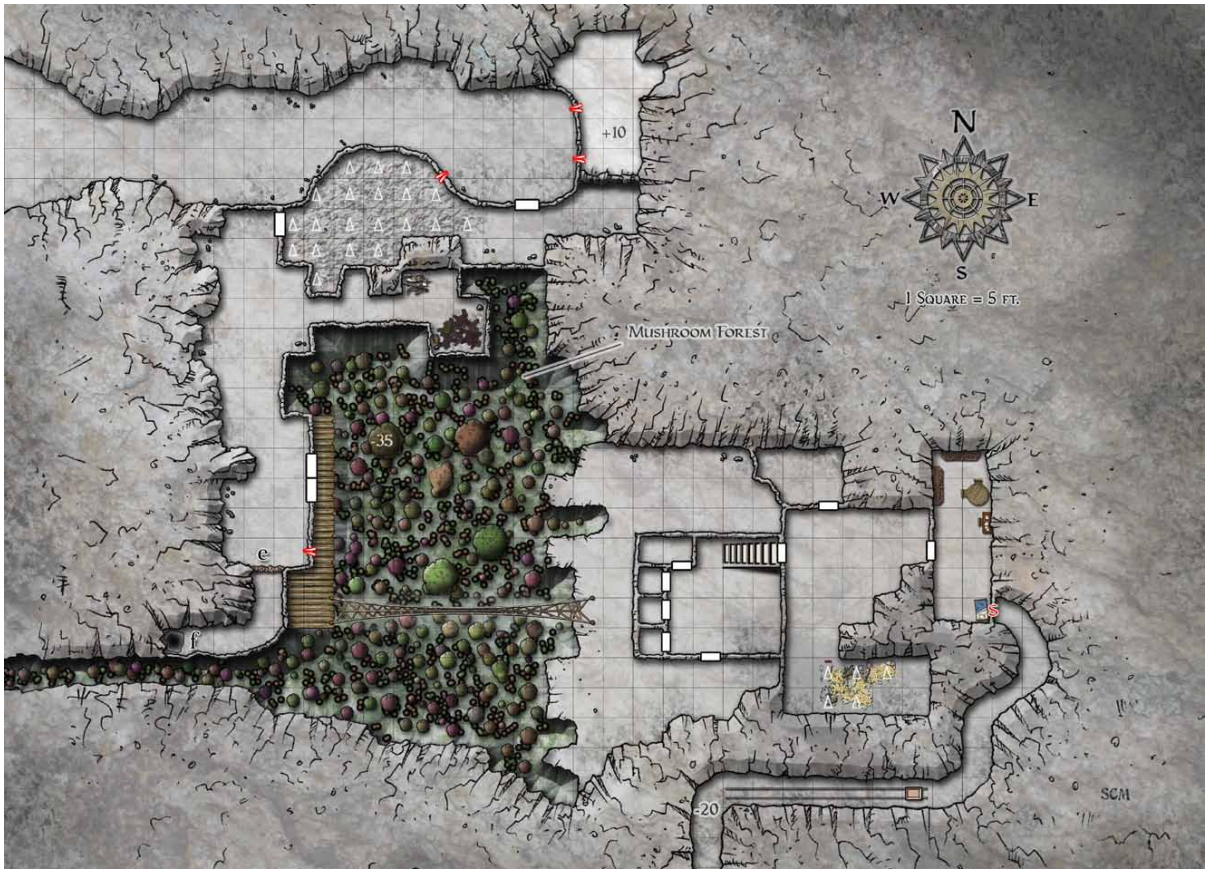
It's said that a cult devoted to Torog operates somewhere in the valley near the King's Wall. A nearby temple of Avandra has never been able to cope with the worst problems presented by the Chaos Scar, but it certainly understands how to deal with Torog. The temple announces that it will pay anyone who can find and eliminate the temple 300 gp. As a start, Avandra's followers point the heroes toward the area in which the Hand of Torog operates.

Quest XP: 50 XP for finding the temple, another 250 XP for erasing the temple from existence, and 200 XP for making sure that none of its priests or servants escape.

Treasure Preparation

Den of the Slaves uses the treasure parcel system described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The PCs should gain a total of four treasure parcels in this adventure, though parcel 3 below is deliberately small. Listed below are the most likely places to find parcels and what those treasure parcels might consist of. The magic weapon should come from the players' wish lists.

Parcel 1: The Hand's Arsenal	**One level 4 magic weapon (not a battleaxe)**
Parcel 2: Cultist's Bodies	**20 gp**
Parcel 3: Treasure Heap	**220 gp and 800 sp**
Parcel 4: Morgana's Desk	**Two 100-gp gems and alchemical formulae (see below)**



GETTING STARTED

Regardless of the hook used to get the PCs into the Chaos Scar, read or paraphrase the following when they reach the vicinity of the slavetaker's lair.

A depression in the valley floor leads to a wide cavern that slopes gently downward. You don't have to be a tracker to tell that many people have walked in and out of this cavern recently, following a single-file trail—tracks from boots and tracks from small feet, likely children or halflings. The cavern slopes gently down, turning into a wide corridor.

CONCLUSION

If the PCs obtained the Chaos Shard, will they destroy it or keep it to find out if they can use it later on? A DC 12 Arcana check reveals that the meteor shard *might* have properties that would make it useful later on, when the PCs have more power and are confronting other beings possessing shards. But the same check also reveals that the shard could be pounded into dust and destroyed with no ill side effects, and that the world would probably be a better place.

Does the mushroom forest's trail lead to a myconid stronghold, or some weirder cavern?

If the Hand of Torog escapes, there's no telling where he'll turn up next.

And if Morgana escapes, she is likely to join a band of murderous halflings who infest a cave nearby in the valley.

S1: Entryway and the First Cave

Encounter Level 1 (550 XP)

Setup

2 clay scouts (C)
Hand of Torog (H)
Mutant arbalester (M)

The area marked as the entryway is the end of a tunnel that runs for another hundred feet or so to the cavern at the surface. Light filters in from the surface and from holes in the ceiling.

Two of the arrow slits (marked in red on the map on page 25) looking out into the entryway are guarded by clay scout homunculi created by Morgana's meteor-twisted rituals. The homunculi don't stir or attack until someone comes within 3 squares of the door.

As indicated in the tactics notes, the mutant arbalester is chained up beside the inner door and is unable to move. Meanwhile the Hand of Torog is out of position, running across from the other side of the rope bridge.

The keys to running this encounter are:

- Flit the clay scouts between the arrow slits and then out of sight as they use their mind touch attack from behind the arrow slit's superior cover.
- Remember to let PCs roll an Acrobatics or Perception check to treat the rubble-strewn entry room as clear terrain that round, rather than as difficult terrain.
- Choose a dramatic moment for the Hand of Torog to get the inner door open to provide the chained-up mutant arbalester with a clear shot into the entryway.

When the PCs approach the outer door and trigger the clay scouts, read:

You see a flash of motion from the arrow slit and a probe of psychic energy erupts in your mind as a misshapen winged creature made of blue stone tries to catch your eyes and pry into your mind.

When the PCs first get a good look at the clay scouts, read:

There's something wrong with these homunculi. They've been altered by weird magic—they glow with blue light and their parts don't fit together properly.

When the inner door opens and the PCs can see the mutant arbalester chained to the wall ahead of them, read:

(Read the first sentence only if the Hand opens the door.)

A gnoll opens the door at the end of the chamber and dodges aside. Behind him, you see a twisted construct made of glowing blue rock. It looks like a giant crossbow on wheels and it seems to be screaming as it looses a bolt.

2 Clay Scouts (C) **Level 2 Lurker**
Small elemental animate (construct, homunculus) XP 125

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +6; darkvision
HP 31; **Bloodied** 15
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 15
Immune disease, poison
Speed 6, fly 3 (clumsy)

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+3 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and the homunculus makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +2 vs. Fortitude; the target is slowed (save ends)

↛ **Mind Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 10; +5 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 3 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends)

Guard Object
The clay scout gains a +4 bonus to attack rolls against targets adjacent to or carrying its guarded object.

Limited Invisibility ✦ **Illusion**
The clay scout is invisible to dazed creatures.

Redirect (immediate interrupt, when targeted by a melee or ranged attack; at-will)
The clay scout makes an attack against the attacker: +4 vs. Will; the triggering attack targets a creature adjacent to the clay scout instead (as chosen by the clay scout).

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Skills Stealth +8

Str 10 (+1)	**Dex** 15 (+3)	**Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 13 (+2)	**Int** 10 (+1)	**Cha** 16 (+4)

The Hand of Torog (H)	Level 3 Brute
Medium natural humanoid, gnoll	XP 150
Initiative +2	**Senses** Perception +4; low-light vision
HP 52; **Bloodied** 26	
AC 14; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 12, **Will** 12	
Speed 6	
Battleaxe (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+7 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, or 1d8+8 while bloodied.	
Quick Bite (at-will; free, when gnoll marauder hits a bloodied enemy with a melee attack)	
The Hand of Torog makes a bite attack against the same target; +4 vs. AC; 1d6 + 1 damage, or 1d6+4 damage while bloodied.	
Desperate Loner	
The Hand of Torog deals 5 extra damage on melee attacks when 2 or more enemies are adjacent to it.	
Alignment Chaotic Evil	**Languages** Abyssal, Common
Skills Endurance +7, Intimidate +5	
Str 18 (+5)	**Dex** 12 (+2) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 12 (+2)	**Int** 7 (-1) **Cha** 5 (-2)
Equipment leather armor, battleaxe	

Mutant Arbalester (M)	Level 3 Artillery
Medium immortal humanoid (construct, homunculus)	XP 150
Initiative +4	**Senses** Perception +8; darkvision
HP 36; **Bloodied** 18	
AC 15; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 14	
Immune disease, poison (and push, pull, slide when chained)	
Speed 6 (0 when chained)	
Slam (standard; at-will)	
+10 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage	
Bolt (standard; at-will)	
Ranged 20/40; +10 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage	
Perverse Double Shot (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃)	
The arbalester makes two bolt attacks, each against a different target. The targets must be within 5 squares of each other. If an ally of the mutant arbalester is within 5 squares of its first target, there is a 50% chance that it will target that ally with its second shot.	
Guard Self	
At the start of the arbalester's turn, if an enemy is within 2 squares, the arbalester recharges its *double shot* power.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 12 (+2)	**Int** 4 (-2) **Cha** 7 (-1)

Tactics

When the clay scouts see a hero approach within 3 squares of the door, one of the scouts attacks the PCs with *mind touch* while the other flies to ring the alarm bell (marked "b" on the map) and rings it (a standard action). On its next turn, that clay scout returns to an arrow slit, where it has superior cover against attacks from outside, joining its comrade and attacking the intruders with *mind touch*.

The clay scouts aren't smart enough to execute a perfect defense. They stall enemies by dazing them with *mind touch* and use *redirect* whenever possible. The clay scouts are assigned to guard the Hand of Torog. If he shows himself through the inner door, the surviving clay scouts fly to his side, so long as they can do so without taking attacks of opportunity.

Penetrating the cave's defenses would be much harder for the PCs if the Hand of Torog hadn't abandoned his post to bask in the sounds and smells of worship. The one-armed gnoll's assigned role during the ceremonies is to guard the entryway alongside the clay scouts and the mutant arbalester. Going by the book, he's supposed to lead the fight against any intruders or hapless travelers, while sending one of the clay scouts to the temple to warn Morgana. But because the Hand was lurking with his ears pressed to the temple wall, he runs for the entryway upon hearing the alarm bell without revealing his dereliction by warning those within the temple.

The Hand enters initiative the round after the alarm bell is rung (most likely to be round 2 of combat). His first order of business is to reach the mutant arbalester. The arbalester remains chained to the wall, but undoing the locks that bind the arbalester's firing mechanism requires a standard action on the Hand's part, consuming his actions in the second round of the fight.

Cursing loud enough to be heard through the thin doors, the Hand uses his next turn to throw open the inner door, hoping to give the mutant arbalester an enemy target. If there are no enemies in the entry room yet, the Hand leaves the door open so the arbalester has an open field of fire and dodges back toward his quarters out of the arbalester's sight while it deals with enemies.

Unlike savage gnolls addicted to the frenzy of the pack, the Hand is a survivor first. When bloodied, he tries to escape. If he still has over 25% of his hit points when he gets clear, he runs back through the open doors into the main cavern and across the bridge, where he gathers the forces from the second encounter by running to the door of the temple, before the PCs have a chance to take a short rest or fully search that side of the cavern. If he is already below 25% hit points when he runs, the Hand abandons all thoughts of continuing the fight, runs south past the double doors leading to the rope bridge, and plunges through the curtain of dried mushrooms (marked "e" on the main map, page 25) leading to his privy/bolthole (marked "f" on the map, page 25). After diving through, he tries to take his chances cutting away from the cavern along the strip of mushroom forest, but see the notes on the privy below.

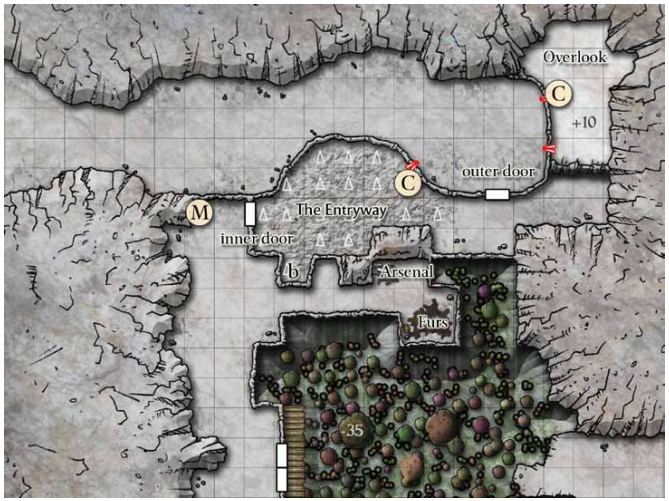
Features of the Area

Clay Scout Overlook: The east end of the entry room has a 10-foot wall, easily scalable (DC 5 Athletics check) that leads to a 6-foot-tall section where the clay scouts fly to use the arrow slits. The scouts aren't quite smart enough to retreat there on their own, but the Hand can order them to do so if he can see them.

Double Doors: The double metal doors are presently wide open so that the Hand can hear the alarm bell.

Outer Door: This poorly-made wooden door is barred on the inside with an iron wedge made of rusty old swords. If Morgana paid attention to the outside world, she would have noticed that the door is no longer up to the standards of her defense plans, but the Hand of Torog is left to handle such maintenance tasks. The door can't be opened with Thievery, but a DC 10 Strength check will smash it open enough for small characters to slip through, while a DC 15 Strength check will force it all the way open.

Chokepoint Rubble: The entryway is full of jumbled rocks and rubble, but regular trips through by the slavetakers and cultists have resulted in more stable footing and a couple of well-worn tracks. As a free action at the start of their turn, a PC can attempt his or her choice of a DC 10 Acrobatics check or a DC 15 Perception check. Success allows the PC to move in the room as if it was normal terrain until the start of his or her next turn. Failure means the floor counts as rubble for the PC until the start of his or her next turn.



The Hand's Arsenal: This is a collection of cast-off and leftover weapons. The disturbing genius of the collection is that the Hand contrives to arrange each of the dozen or so weapons in his collection so that they rest in the dismembered hand of a victim of the temple. The Hand doesn't actually use any of these weapons, so the collection is something of an art installation. It's also a guilty secret. Morgana doesn't know about it, hence the possibility that a garbage-crusted but otherwise splendid magic weapon (but not a magical battleaxe) rests in the skeletal hand of one of the temple's victims (Treasure Parcel 1).

The Hand's Furs: These lice-ridden sleeping furs sit next to a keg of nasty liquor, both of which could be induced to burst into flames if they're subject to any fire damage. The only unusual items are piles of hyena skulls and antelope horns, jumbled together in heaps around the furs. If the furs catch fire, a creature in the area or an adjacent square is subject to an attack: +4 vs. Reflex, 1d6+1 fire damage.

Inner Door: If the Hand doesn't manage to get to the door himself, this rickety wooden door can be opened with either a DC 10 Thievery check or a DC 5 Strength check.

Privy and Bolthole: Anyone living (other than the Hand) must make a DC 15 Endurance check to venture any portion of their body into the pit. It's large enough to offer a slimy slip-and-slide down into the mushroom cavern detailed in *area 2*. Barring unusual circumstances, any creature passing through this bolthole lands in the mushroom forest below, unharmed, except for the 1d6 poison damage for landing in the mushroom forest. Covered in filth, the creature suffers a –5 penalty on all Charisma-based skills for the remainder of the encounter.

If the Hand has fled here, it's possible he's already under attack by myconids as soon as he lands in the mushroom forest. It's up to you to decide whether the myconids ignore the fleeing Hand (they're used to his smell) or leave hiding and try to kill him.

S2: Mushroom Cavern & Rope Bridge

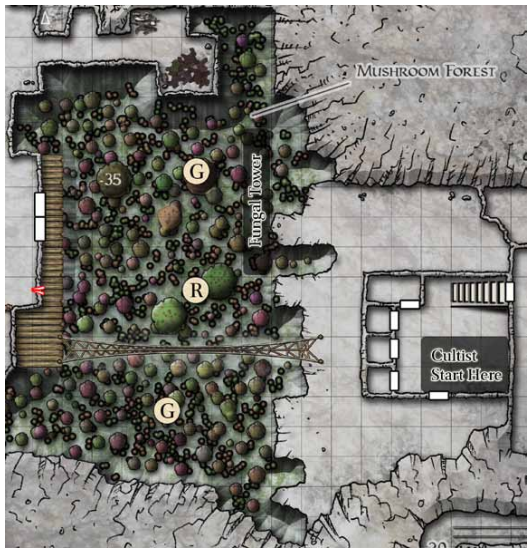
Encounter Level 1 (350 XP)

Clay scout (C)
Stonefist defender (S)
4 cultist archers (A)

In addition, the heroes have a chance to trigger an additional encounter

Encounter Level 1 (500 XP)

Myconid rotpriest (R)
2 myconid guards (M)



Setup

The dividing line between these two encounter areas is more a matter of pacing than of physical space. The doors to the cavern are wide open, and nearby, the PCs can find an arrow slit (marked in red on the map) to peer through first if they're leery of hanging out near the open doors.

The monsters in the main cavern have no immediate interest in crossing over or climbing up to confront the PCs. The cultists are busy with a torture ritual to create new homunculi and botched witherlings. The myconids are planning a later assault to capture the meteor fragment. One likely course of events is that the PC search this side of the cavern thoroughly and take a short rest before determining how to cross to the other side of the cavern. If the PCs surprise you, use the elements of the encounters that follow to improvise.

The fight with the cultist minions and a couple homunculi isn't meant to be particularly challenging if the PCs cross using the bridge to confront the cultists directly.

If the PCs make things difficult for themselves by avoiding the rope bridge and crossing the floor of the cavern, they're likely to encounter the myconids, which might or might not lead to a fight.

The myconids warn the PCs away, gesturing that the PCs should go back and come no further. If the PCs ignore the warning and advance closer to the hidden fungal tower, the myconids attack. If the PCs end up fighting the myconids, they also have to deal with the cultists in the middle of the myconid fight.

If the PCs do fight with the myconids, skip encounter 5 later in the adventure.

When the PCs first look out across the cavern, read the following:

The symbol of Torog glares at you from the other side of a large cavern. Painted on the wall in dark pigment, this 15-foot-tall symbol graces the stone wall of a building. There's no sign of motion in the cavern, except for the pulsing green light that comes from the bottom of the chasm filling the cave. From what you can see, the chasm is filled with mushrooms of all sizes, many of them glowing with phosphorescence. It smells terrible. As you peer across, you hear a muffled scream from the building featuring the symbol of Torog. It has no doors or windows you can see, but a coarse rope bridge stretches across the chasm.

When the PCs first step onto the wooden platform above the cavern, read:

Now that you're closer, you can see pieces of corpses and skeletons scattered on and through the mushrooms at the base of the far wall, as if someone had thrown bodies off the edge.

After a PC gets halfway across the bridge, or sets foot on the temple-side of the cavern after climbing the walls, read the following:

You hear a scrape from the south side of the rough stone building with the Torog symbol burned on it. Another blue homunculus flaps awkwardly into view, along with a lurching blue creature made entirely of blue stone, all making directly for you. Humans in blood-splattered gray robes bearing the symbol of Torog follow around the south corner of the building, carrying longbows. One screams, "Turn back fools! Torog gives us strength, and you can never defeat our might. We are invinc..."

If the PCs haven't alreadyinterrupted and killed the screaming cultist, another gray-robed figure cuffs his fellow, taking a moment to yell "Shut up! Just shut up!" before firing his own bow at the PCs.

If a PC climbs or falls to the mushroom floor and enters a square within 3 squares of one of the concealed myconids' positions, read:

A large mushroom ahead of you shakes itself back and forth, throwing off the debris that covered it. It rises to reveal arms and legs. Once on its feet, it lifts its arms and gestures that you should go back the way you came.

If the PCs turn around, away from the fungal tower, the myconid that gave the warning watches them go and then returns to hiding. If a fight starts, the other two myconids emerge and attack. See encounter S3 for the myconids' statistics.

If a PC enters a space adjacent to the hidden fungal tower, read:

There's something buried in the debris here—some sort of structure, lying on its side, which appears to have been constructed of mushrooms. Still under construction, it seems to be a tower waiting to be raised.

Clay Scout (C) **Level 2 Lurker**
Small elemental animate (construct, homunculus) XP 125

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +6; darkvision
HP 31; **Bloodied** 15
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 15
Immune disease, poison
Speed 6, fly 3 (clumsy)

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+3 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and the homunculus makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +2 vs. Fortitude; the target is slowed (save ends)

Mind Touch (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 10; +5 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 3 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends)

Guard Object
The clay scout gains a +4 bonus to attack rolls against targets adjacent to or carrying its guarded object.

Limited Invisibility ✦ **Illusion**
The clay scout is invisible to dazed creatures.

Redirect (immediate interrupt, when targeted by a melee or ranged attack; at-will)
The clay scout makes an attack against the attacker: +4 vs. Will; the triggering attack targets a creature adjacent to the clay scout instead (as chosen by the clay scout).

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Skills Stealth +8
Str 10 (+1) **Dex** 15 (+3) **Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 16 (+4)

Stonefist Defender (S) **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Small elemental beast (construct, homunculus) XP 125

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +4; darkvision
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 14
Immune disease, poison
Speed 8

⊕ **Spiked Fist** (standard; at-will)
+7 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.

Guard Creature
A stonefist defender gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against any enemy adjacent to its guarded creature (see Tactics, below).

Synchronized Flank
While a stonefist defender is flanking an enemy with its guarded creature, its attacks deal 1d6 extra damage against the flanked enemy.

Tumble (move; at-will)
The stonefist defender shifts 3 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Skills Acrobatics +9
Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 17 (+4)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 11 (+1) **Cha** 7 (-1)

4 Archer Cultists (A) **Level 1 Minion Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 25

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +0
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 13; **Fortitude** 13; **Reflex** 14; **Will** 13
Speed 6

Shortbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +8 vs. AC; 3 damage, or 5 damage if an ally is adjacent to the target.

⊕ **Shortsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+6 vs. AC; 3 damage.

Archer's Dodge
The archer cultist has +4 to AC vs. opportunity attacks.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Str 10 (+0) **Dex** 16 (+3) **Wis** 10 (+0)
Con 10 (+0) **Int** 10 (+0) **Cha** 10 (+0)

Tactics

Cultist Fight: The two homunculi focus mindlessly on the nearest enemies. The stonefist defender is currently guarding the clay scout, so the two fight near one another. The defender tries to stay near the clay scout, which prefers to use *mind touch* over its *bite*, but will engage if provoked by ranged attackers. At that point, the clay scout moves with it, flying and landing to stay near the defender. Clever PCs might have no trouble luring the stone defender onto the bridge or near the edge where it could be pushed off into the mushroom cavern.

The archers have no intention of closing to melee; they spread out as best they can around the temple. They might try to retreat after loosing a couple arrows apiece, but they find the door they emerged from shut against them.

Myconid Fight: The three myconids concentrate their attacks, when possible, on the PC who is nearest their hidden fungal tower. If all the PCs manage to climb or ascend back to the temple level, the myconids break off combat and return to hiding, biding their time for their later assault.

If the PCs begin fighting the myconids, wait a couple turns, then bring the bow-armed cultists to the edge of the cavern. The cultists aim mostly at the PCs instead of the myconids, though they may take a shot at a myconid or two. The two homunculi do not join the fight until PCs come to the level of the temple, either by climbing or taking the rope bridge.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Sickly green light from the mushrooms fills the cavern. It counts as normal light.

Central Cavern: The floor of the central cavern is 35feet below the ledges and cavern floors on either side. A fall from either side of the cavern to the floor below deals 3d10 damage, and subjects the creature to an attack for falling into the poisonous mushrooms: +4 vs. Fortitude, 1d6 poison damage (see the mushroom forest below). The walls are moderately difficult to climb, a DC 10 Athletics check.

Fungal Tower: Until later in the adventure, the myconid's fungal tower lies lengthwise along the west edge of the cavern, waiting to be raised when the myconids are ready to assault the temple to seize the meteor shard.

The Mushroom Forest: Dank and poisonous mushrooms ranging from normal size to man-sized giants sprout everywhere on the floor of this cavern. If you move carefully in the mushroom forest, treating the ground as difficult terrain, you can avoid brushing against poisonous mushrooms and their drifting spores. Any non-plant creature that moves faster is subject to an attack: +4 vs. Fortitude, 1d6 poison damage. A creature can only provoke this attack by moving, but is subject to it only once per turn.

Rope Bridge: At its central and lowest point, the rope bridge hangs only 20 feet above the floor of the mushroom forest. Consider rope bridge squares to be difficult terrain. The bridge is anchored solidly at either side by deep-set wooden posts. The quickest way to destroy the bridge would be to cut it apart on one side. Each of the thick ropes supporting the bridge has an AC of 5 and 30 hp on each end. The bridge won't collapse until two ropes were cut. The cultists have no interest in cutting themselves off by destroying the bridge.

Anyone on or adjacent to the bridge can use the following at-will terrain attack.

Shake the Bridge — **At-Will Attack**

This rickety bridge spans a deep gap. One sudden move, and it sways perilously, threatening to put anyone on it over the side.

Standard Action
Requirement: You must be on or adjacent to the bridge.
Check: Athletics check (DC 10) to sway the bridge.
Success: The bridge sways.
Target: Each creature standing on the bridge (including you, if applicable)
Attack: Level + 3 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target is knocked prone.

S3: The Lower Temple

Encounter Level 1 (XP 525)

Setup

Morgana, halfling priestess of Torog (M)
Scalpel, human torturer (S)
2 botched witherlings (B)
3 evil ritualists (E)

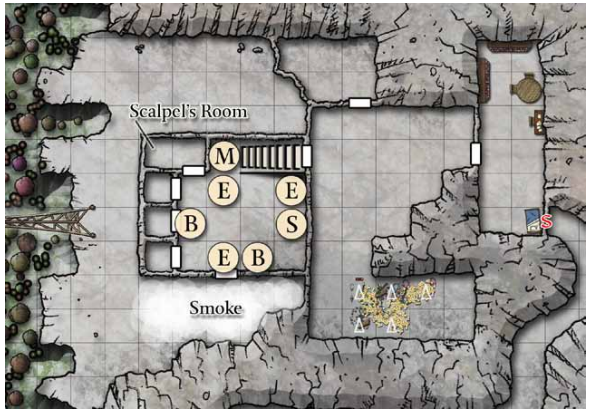
Opening the door to the inner temple isn't difficult (DC 10 Thievery or Strength check), though the cultists inside won't open it themselves. They have attempted to finish their ritual, but they are ready to be attacked. They prefer to fight inside the temple, where the terrain suits them, but only Morgana has ranged attacks that can pull PCs inside, so if the PCs try to fight from outside, they might eventually get their wish.

The ceremony underway in the temple is slightly more than a sadistic torture session, thanks to the power of the meteor fragment embedded in a 30-pound boulder Morgana lugs with her as she moves about the room. Of the six slaves who were brought into the room, the two humans are dead and piled in a corner. Two of the halflings survive. One is locked into a small cell on the west side of the building.

The main feature of this fight is the bizarrely low ceiling that honors the King Who Crawls, "so that all who come into Torog's presence must crawl like the god." The low ceiling forces most creatures to fight hunched over or kneeling. See the jagged ceiling feature in Features of the Area. The witherlings deal more damage to any creature they have combat advantage against, so the low ceiling is potentially lethal, rather than just a nuisance. The other ongoing feature of the fight is the eddying smoke (again, see Features of the Area).

Most of the creatures in the temple fight to the death, but Morgana bolts through the door at the top of the stairs toward her escape route, lugging the boulder with her, as soon as one of the nonminions in the fight is eliminated, she is bloodied herself, or when two of the nonminions in the fight are bloodied.

When the PCs first look inside the temple, read:
The inside of the building is a macabre murder scene. The ceiling is jagged and low, so that anyone taller than a halfling must stoop or kneel. Hunched in the flickering light of torches on the walls are a motley collection of thickly tattooed humans with long daggers, glowing blue monsters, and prone victims. Two of the creatures are horrid, featuring the skulls of hyenas stitched onto the still bloody shoulders of recently slain halflings. The creatures' eyes, and their bodies where skull meets neck, glow the same weird blue as the homunculi you killed earlier... and the same blue as the big chunk of rock in the arms of the female halfling in red robes on stairs at the back of the room. She booms "Kill them quickly, blessed ones!" in a bass voice that must be augmented by magic, since it shakes the walls and makes the thick, toxic-smelling smoke that eddies around the room surge forward.



At some point during the fight, read:
Two male human slaves appear to be dead, shoved in a corner. Of the halflings who were taken as slaves, one is cowering in a cell on the west wall and one is half-dead and chained in to the floor by the stairwell. The other two seem to have been turned into the hyena-headed monsters that are attacking you.

Once the PCs are fully in the room they can make Perception checks to notice one more feature.

Perception (DC 10):
The floor here is unsteady, and you've just realized why. Chunks of the floor are missing, magically pulled straight from the solid rock. Looking closer, you realize each missing piece is the exact shape of one of the small constructs you fought earlier.

Morgana, Priest of Torog (M) **Level 3 Controller**
Small natural humanoid, halfling XP 150

Initiative +1 **Senses** Perception +1
HP 43; **Bloodied** 21
AC 17; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 16
Speed 6

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+8 vs. AC; 1d4 + 3 damage.

Blinding Bomb (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Area burst 1 within 10; +6 vs. Reflex; the target treats all nonadjacent creatures as having concealment until the end of your next turn. Creatures that do not rely on sight to detect other creatures are immune to this effect.

Torog's Wrath (standard; at-will)) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 5; +7 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 3 necrotic damage, and the next attack made against the target has a +2 bonus.

Kneel Before Torog (standard; recharges when bloodied) ✦ **Psychic**
Close blast 3; +8 vs. Will; 1d8 + 3 psychic damage and the target is knocked prone

Sacrifice Underling (immediate interrupt, when Morgana takes damage from an attack, and only while she is adjacent to her meteorite shard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃)
Morgana takes half the damage of the attack, and an ally within 5 squares takes the rest of the damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Skills Intimidate +9, Religion +6
Str 11 (+1) **Dex** 11 (+1) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 11 (+1) **Int** 11 (+1) **Cha** 17 (+4)
Equipment robes, Chaos Shard (sliver of the meteor), 6 blinding bombs

Scalpel, Human Torturer (S) **Level 1 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid XP 100

Initiative +1 **Senses** Perception +0
HP 32; **Bloodied** 16
AC 13; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 12
Speed 6

Scalpel (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+4 vs. AC; 1d4 + 3 and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Acrobatics +6, Intimidate +5
Str 16 (+3) **Dex** 12 (+1) **Wis** 10 (+0)
Con 12 (+1) **Int** 10 (+0) **Cha** 10 (+0)
Equipment scalpel

2 Botched Witherlings (B) **Level 1 Skirmisher**
Small elemental magical beast (undead) XP 100

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception -1; low-light vision
HP 30; **Bloodied** 15
AC 15; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12
Speed 6, climb 6

Claw (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 1 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends)

Double Attack (standard; usable only while bloodied; at-will)
The witherling makes two claw attacks

Combat Advantage
A witherling deals 1d6 extra damage on attacks against any creature granting combat advantage to it.

Blood Dance (minor; usable only while bloodied; at-will)
The witherling shifts 2 squares.

Pack Attack
A witherling's melee attacks deal 2 extra damage against any enemy that has two or more of the witherling's allies adjacent to it.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Str 9 (-1) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 9 (-1)
Con 14 (+2) **Int** 5 (-3) **Cha** 10 (+0)

3 Evil Ritualists (E) **Level 1 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 25

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +0
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 15; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13
Speed 6

Sacrificial Dagger (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC, 4 damage

Unholy Vigor (free action)
When an evil ritualist, or an ally within 5 squares, scores a critical hit, this creature makes an immediate melee basic attack against an adjacent enemy.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 10 (+0) **Dex** 16 (+3) **Wis** 10 (+0)
Con 10 (+0) **Int** 10 (+0) **Cha** 10 (+0)

Tactics

Unlike the half-hearted minions who fought outside, Scalpel and his similarly tattooed evil ritualist minions are crazed with a lust for blood. They fight to the death, gloating over damage they deal, particularly if one of their number lands a critical hit.

The witherlings focus on characters who are providing the creatures with combat advantage.

As mentioned above, Morgana flees when things go bad, but until then she fights all-out. Once Morgana runs, she heads through the door at the top of the stairs, pauses to open the door to the garden room if she has time, then runs for her chambers and the secret door. She might pause to throw a blinding bomb or two from the top of the stairs as a final parting gift, but only if some of her allies are still standing.

Blinding Bomb

When thrown, this fist-sized ceramic sphere explodes in a blinding flash.

Level: 3
Price: 30 gp
Alchemical Item
Power (Consumable): Standard Action. Make an attack: Area burst 1 within 10; +6 vs. Fortitude; on a hit, the target treats all nonadjacent creatures as having concealment until the end of your next turn. Creatures that do not rely on sight to detect other creatures are immune to this effect.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The temple is lit by the glow of the meteorite, torches on the walls, and luminous blood stains sprayed on the walls and floor.

Eddying Smoke: The torches on the wall put out belches of foul smoke, stoked to toxicity by some of Morgana's herbs. The smoke surges out of the temple and covers nine squares outside the south wall of the temple. Any creature that ends its turn in one of those squares takes 2 damage from the toxic smoke.

Jagged Ceiling: In honor of the King Who Crawls, the lower temple has a low and jagged ceiling that forces Medium or larger creatures to fight hunched over or on their knees. Such creatures grant combat advantage to all attackers unless they make a DC 15 Acrobatics check at the start of their turn as a free action.

Scalpel's Room: The door to Scalpel's disgusting den does not lock. Torture implements festoon every surface. He sleeps dangling from some of his hooks.

Small Cells: These cells are more like cages with narrow bars and doors that lock with keys that Scalpel carries. One door is locked, containing the intact halfling kidnap victim. The other doors are open. Attacks through the bars of the cages are possible, but grant targets on the other side cover.

Stairs and Door: The stairs (and ceiling) rise 10 feet to a door that locks.

Sacrificial Victim: The other still-living halfling in the room will not remain that way for much longer. He's bleeding from the wounds of Scalpel's ministrations, and will die in 3 rounds unless stabilized with a DC 10 Heal check. A creature who makes a DC 15 Perception or Heal check (a free action) from the entrance realizes that the halfling is still alive and can be saved.

S4: The Upper Temple

Encounter Level 0 or 1 (XP 0 or 100)

Setup

1 botched witherling (B)

Unless other fights spill into this area, the upper temple isn't likely to be the sight of a long fight. Morgana attempts to flee through here with her meteor shard. Escaping means a lot more to her than winning the fight, so she only attacks as a last resort.

If Morgana died in the room below, when a PC enters or looks through the door at the top of the stairs, read:

You see a door to your left and a door straight ahead. To your right, you also see a pile of gold and other coins spilled out on the floor in a heap.

If Morgana preceded the PCs up the stairs, read:

Bright sunlight spills out of a door on the left. The room is full of plants in pots and in long planters. When you can pry your eyes away from the sunlight, you see another door straight ahead. And on your right, down the corridor, are piles of gold coins, just heaped up on the floor.

If the PCs open the secret door while pursuing Morgana, read:

A small figure with claws reaches for your throats. It's another of the twisted little witherlings, crouched behind the door waiting for you.

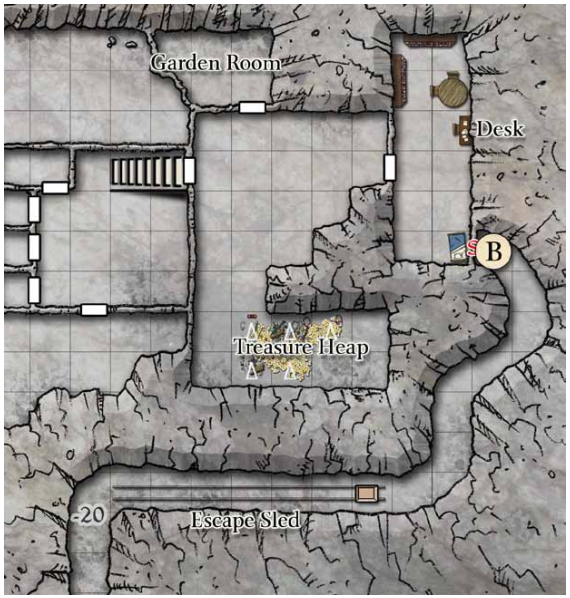
If the PCs get control of the rock containing the shard, read:

The shard is a chunk of blue rock about the size of a fist protruding from a black boulder. You can sense immediately that the shard is a source of potent magic—and equally potent evil.

Botched Witherling (B)	**Level 1 Skirmisher**
Small elemental magical beast (undead)	XP 100
Initiative +5	**Senses** Perception -1; low-light vision
HP 30; **Bloodied** 15	
AC 15; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12	
Speed 6, climb 6	
⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)	
+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 1 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends)	
⸸ **Double Attack** (standard; usable only while bloodied; at-will)	
The witherling makes two claw attacks	
Combat Advantage	
A witherling deals 1d6 extra damage on attacks against any creature granting combat advantage to it.	
Blood Dance (minor; usable only while bloodied; at-will)	
The witherling shifts 2 squares.	
Pack Attack	
A witherling's melee attacks deal 2 extra damage against any enemy that has two or more of the witherling's allies adjacent to it.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Abyssal, Common
Str 9 (-1)	**Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 9 (-1)
Con 14 (+2)	**Int** 5 (-3) **Cha** 10 (+0)

Tactics

As mentioned earlier, when Morgana gets to the top of the stairs, she first opens the door to the Garden Room. Then she lugs the meteorite toward her room and the escape tunnel behind the secret door.



Features of the Area

Illumination: The upper temple area, and Morgana's room, are both lit with candles. The escape tunnel is dimly lit by small glowing pebbles that Morgana would normally pick up as she goes, but with the meteor boulder in her arms she can't take the time to pick them up. The blue meteorite provides light as well, depending on how far the PCs are behind the priest.

The Escape Tunnel: The tunnel behind the secret door eventually leads up to the surface of the valley. Somewhere near the first bend in the tunnel, Morgana has set up a panel on the wall and seven buried spearpoints thrusting up from the ground slightly covered by dirt. A passive Perception check (DC 10) reveals what looks like a spear trap. An active Perception check (DC 15) reveals that the supposed trap is entirely fake, nothing more than spearpoints in dirt and a metal panel attached to the wall. Speeding over the "trap" may not reveal it as fake, but the trap won't fire.

Garden Room: This small room is full of rows of herbs and flowers and edible plants in pots, all basking in the light of three sun rods, so that light shines out of the door glaringly when the door is opened into the much darker upper temple. If Morgana has escaped past the room and opened the door, the light spilling out might be distracting, and will certainly illuminate the sizeable pile of gold down at the south end of the chamber.

If you like, and one of the characters expresses an interest in going through the plants to find out if there's anything useful, you could reward their diligence with a couple species used to make the blinding bombs and greenbane whose formulas are located in her desk. Those plants might be worth 20 gp if taken back to civilization or an herbalist. Otherwise, the room is simply an expression of Morgana's fondness for gardening and fresh vegetables.

Morgana's Bed: This is a halfling-sized bed with fur blankets. The secret door is located above the bed on the wall where someone normal might have hung a work of art.

Morgana's Escape Sled: Morgana intends to speed down this difficult slope on a sled she has set on rails. The rocky slope on the other side of the sled's rails is difficult terrain for anyone else. When Morgana moves into the square containing her sled, she ends her move action boarding it. Her next minor action takes her all the way down the slope. She makes a DC 10 Acrobatics check to land on her feet at the bottom; otherwise she is prone in the square past the rails. If Morgana can get off the map, she enters a maze of corridors too small for Medium creatures, which should enable her to escape and reach the surface without further risk of being caught. It's an area the PCs probably shouldn't be interested in exploring unless they all attempt to run away from the myconids in encounter 5, and even then the size of the tunnels makes this escape route awkward.

Morgana's Desk: This desk is a sophisticated, darkwood, halfling-sized desk. The papers include the alchemical formula for a blinding bomb like the one that Morgana likely threw earlier (see *Adventurer's Vault 2*, page 26) and the formula for a new alchemical item called greenbane that Morgana used to keep the creatures from the lower cavern at bay (worth 160 gp). If the PCs search the desk at their leisure, the discovery of the greenbane formula could be followed immediately by the schlurping sound of the myconid's fungal tower coming up to the temple level, triggering encounter S5.

Greenbane **Level 4+**

This stick of fast-burning incense creates a haze of smoke that keeps plant creatures from closing on the user.

Lvl 4	160 gp	Lvl 19	9,400 gp
Lvl 9	320 gp	Lvl 24	42,000 gp
Lvl 14	1,600 gp	Lvl 29	210,000 gp

Alchemical Item

Power (Consumable ✦ Zone): Standard Action. Make an attack: Close burst 1; targets plants only; +10 vs. Fortitude; the burst creates a zone, and targets that are hit slide to the closest square outside the zone. The zone lasts until the end of the encounter, and plants that move into an affected square or begin their turn in an affected square are subject to the same attack from the greenbane.
Level 9: +15 vs. Fortitude.
Level 14: +20 vs. Fortitude.
Level 19: +25 vs. Fortitude.
Level 24: +30 vs. Fortitude.
Level 29: +35 vs. Fortitude.

Secret Door: Spotting the door takes a DC 15 Perception check. If Morgana is in the act of escaping, model the frenzy of the chase by letting the PC with the highest Perception roll every round, with a +1 for every PC helping.

The first surprise in the tunnel is a final botched witherling, made in a previous batch, waiting on the other side of the secret door to attack anyone who comes through. Roll initiative rather than using a surprise round.

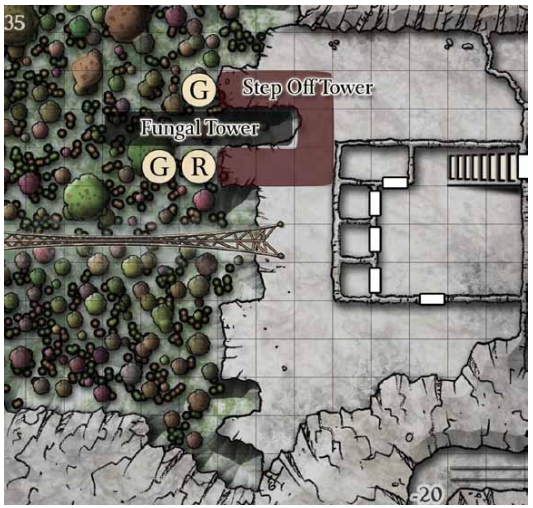
Treasure: Morgana leaves her gold lying around, figuring that some assailants might be distracted by money. The heap contains 220 gp and 800 sp.

S5: Rise of the Fungal Tower

Encounter Level 1 (XP 500)

Setup

2 myconid guards (M)
Myconid rotpriest (R)



The PCs can be forgiven for thinking their work is over. But if they failed to fight the myconids in an earlier encounter, or if you think the adventure could be improved with a final desperate encounter, the myconids raise the giant fungal tower they have been gluing together with spittle and ooze. The fungal tower acts as a ramp to the temple level. The myconids march up to seize the meteor fragment.

The first sign of trouble will be when the fungal tower erupts to the temple-level with a giant schlurping sound, audible no matter how far away the PCs might be. The myconids proceed up the fungal tower moving at their normal speed and do their best to take or pursue the fragment of the meteorite. Along the way, any PCs who approached within 3 squares of the meteorite within the past hour are treated as potential meteorite holders. PCs who avoided coming within 3 squares of the meteorite might be ignored, provided they don't attack the myconids.

Negotiating with the myconids isn't likely. If the PCs possess the meteorite, drop it where the myconids can get it, and back off, the myconids will pick it up and seek to withdraw to their cavern. Any subsequent attacks will result in a fight to the death.

Read the following when the PCs confront the myconids:

Fragments of the mushroom chamber seem to have acquired arms and legs and murderous beady eyes. Three mushroom people are advancing on you, one taller creature with a wide cap and a staff and two smaller specimens people with mighty fists.

2 Myconid Guards (M)		**Level 4 Soldier**
Medium fey humanoid (plant)		XP 175
Initiative +5	**Senses** Perception +3; tremorsense 10	
HP 56; **Bloodied** 28		
AC 18; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14		
Speed 6		
⊕ **Spiny Strike** (standard; at-will)		
+11 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage.		
⊹ **Pacification Spores** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Poison**		
Close burst 1; +9 vs. Will; 1d6 + 3 poison damage, and the target cannot take a standard action until the end of the myconid guard's next turn.		
Roots of the Colony (free, when the myconid guard is hit by an attack while a myconid ally is within 5 squares of it; at-will)		
The myconid guard takes half damage from the attack, and the myconid ally takes the same amount of damage.		
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –	
Str 18 (+6)	**Dex** 16 (+5)	**Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 16 (+5)	**Int** 8 (+1)	**Cha** 10 (+2)

Myconid Rotpriest (R)		**Level 3 Brute (Leader)**
Medium fey humanoid (plant)		XP 150
Initiative +2	**Senses** Perception +3; tremorsense 10	
HP 48; **Bloodied** 24; see also *life burst*		
Regeneration 5		
AC 15; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 16		
Vulnerable radiant (if the myconid rotpriest takes radiant damage, regeneration does not function until the end of the rotpriest's next turn)		
Speed 5		
⊕ **Stipe Staff** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
+6 vs. AC; 2d10 + 3 damage.		
⊹ **Decomposing Spray** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**		
Close burst 3; +6 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 3 necrotic damage.		
⊹ **Life Burst** (when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Healing**		
Close burst 1; targets living creatures; the target regains 10 hit points.		
Roots of the Colony (free, when the myconid rotpriest is hit by an attack while a myconid ally is within 5 squares of it; at-will)		
The rotpriest takes half damage from the attack, and the myconid ally takes the same amount of damage.		
Sacrifice for the Colony (free, when a myconid ally uses *roots of the colony* to deal damage to the myconid rotpriest; at-will)		
The rotpriest takes the damage dealt to the ally, and the ally takes none.		
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –	
Str 10 (+1)	**Dex** 12 (+2)	**Wis** 15 (+3)
Con 18 (+5)	**Int** 10 (+1)	**Cha** 18 (+5)
Equipment staff		

Tactics

The myconids guards try to use their pacification spores as quickly as they can. Meanwhile the rotpriest slams away with its *stipe staff* and *decomposing spray*. All of the myconids cooperate to use *roots of the colony* to funnel damage where it can be dealt with best.

About the Author

Rob Heinsoo led the design of the 4th Edition D&D® Roleplaying Game. His 4th Edition design credits include *Martial Power*™ and the *Forgotten Realms® Player's Guide*. His other game designs include *Three-Dragon Ante*™ and Inn-Fighting.

EPIC
21–30

Grasp of the Mantled Citadel

By Creighton Broadhurst

An adventure for 22nd-level characters

illustrations by William O'Connor
cartography by Mike Schley

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"From here I look out over the gloom of the Forest of Twisted Souls, and although my actions have brought me to this benighted place, I have no regrets. With new allegiances come terrifying opportunities. Who among those living upon the world now have the power, the discipline, and the knowledge to utterly destroy a god? My new mistress is indeed munificent"

"Grasp of the Mantled Citadel" is an adventure for five 22nd-level characters. By the end of the adventure, the PCs should have accumulated enough XP to reach 24th level. This adventure is the second epic-level adventure of the Scales of War adventure path. "Grasp of the Mantled Citadel" is a direct sequel to "Betrayal at Monadhan." With a little work, it can be adapted for use in any campaign.

In this adventure, characters enter the shadowed demiplane of Vaerothim, plunge through the skeletal depths of the Forest of Twisted Souls, and breach the Mantled Citadel's fearsome defense.

BACKGROUND

At the beginning of "Betrayal at Monadhan," the heroes were in Sayre under the Coalition's protection. There they met an angel of secrets going by the name of Rachaela. She told them of the demiplane of Vaerothim and its most dangerous inhabitants—Mornujhar, Black Exarch of Tiamat, and the powerful lich Irfelujhar, a peerless ritual crafter. She didn't know what the pair were up to but desperately desired the information and so paid the heroes to uncover the truth of the matter.

Unfortunately, the demiplane of Vaerothim is accessible only through Monadhan, the Domain of Betrayal, itself part of the Shadowfell.

The PCs' trip to Monadhan was complicated by the difficulty of leaving Monadhan—the domain is a supernatural prison for traitors and betrayers. To reach Vaerothim, the PCs had to locate a portal and the key which unlocks it—the *Sword of Kas*! Ultimately, the heroes met Kas and agreed to a bargain with him. He would tell them how to operate the portal to Vaerothim if they retrieved his sword and returned it to him. After recovering the sword and learning that the weapon itself was the key to the portal, the characters defeated Arantor, an undead dragon and dark lord of Monadhan, and likely double-crossed Kas so that they could activate the portal leading to Vaerothim.

"Grasp of the Mantled Citadel begins as the characters step through the portal into Vaerothim (see "Start the Adventure" on page 43).

QUESTS

In "Grasp of the Mantled Citadel," the characters travel through the Forest of Twisted Souls to the Mantled Citadel to defeat Irfelujhar and uncover the terrifying consequences of his research. Along the way, they can complete two other quests.

Lay Naiethar Traihel to Rest
22nd-Level Minor Quest (4,150 XP)
If the heroes parley with Naiethar Traihel (the dryad lich in **Encounter F4**), she explains that the forest has warped her and her tree. She asks them to take a single bough from her tree (her phylactery) and replant it in untainted soil. If they do so, she is laid to rest.

Freeing Agyrturyte
23rd-Level Minor Quest (5,100 XP)
In **Encounter C4**, the PCs fight Tiamat's Black Exarch Mornujhar. If they defeat him and Agyrturyte survives the ensuing battle, she begs the characters to escort her from the Shadowfell. If they do so, they gain the reward listed above.

Defeating Irfelujhar
23rd-Level Major Quest (25,500 XP)
If the PCs penetrate the Mantled Citadel, defeat Irfelujhar, and discover the nature of his completed research, they gain the reward listed above.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

At the end of "Betrayal at Monadhan," the PCs used the *Sword of Kas* to reach Vaerothim. Arriving on a bleak, high hill in the Forest of Twisted Souls, they can see the gaunt spire of the Mantled Citadel struggling above the warped, skeletal trees of the forest. The tower is at least 10 miles distant, and the PCs must travel through the intervening forest to reach it.

While traveling through the skeletal forest, the characters encounter several groups of creatures. The first is the remnants of a hunting party of Vecna's followers sent here to exact their lord's revenge upon Irfelujhar. These foul creatures try to parley with the heroes but eventually (of course) betray the newcomers and battle ensues.

In the depths of a shadow-mantled valley, they encounter a dryad forced into lichdom by the energy that consumes the forest. If they handle the encounter carefully, they can resolve the situation without violence and gain access to two rituals carved onto the dryad's tree.

On reaching the environ of the Mantled Citadel, they have but one way to proceed—up a steep, tree-flanked path. Ghosts, specters and the very trees of the forest protect the path and must be destroyed before the the citadel can be reached.

In a series of subterranean chambers beneath the citadel, the PCs discover a prison holding one of Bahamut's servants brought here by Mornujhar, the Black Exarch of Tiamat. If the angel survives the ensuing fight, it has useful information for the characters. The heroes encounter a great number of undead, constructs, magical creatures, and fearsome traps as they fight their way upward to Irfelujhar's personal chambers.

Adventuring in the Shadowfell and Vaerothim

The Shadowfell is a reflection of the natural world, darkly cast and twisted. It is also the initial destination of souls just loosed from their bodies. The following are the planar traits for the Shadowfell and Vaerothim, a demiplane linked to the Shadowfell through Monadhan. More information on the plane can be found in the *Manual of the Planes* supplement.

Shadowfell Traits

Type: Parallel plane.

Size and Shape: The shadowfell is a parallel plane with dimensions and topography similar to the mortal world.

Gravity: Normal.

Mutability: Normal.

Gloom: The Shadowfell mutes light sources, reducing the radius of illumination by 50 percent. For example, a torch illuminates 2 squares instead of 5; a lantern illuminates 5 squares instead of 10. Magical light sources are unaffected.

Vaerothim's Traits

Type: Demiplane.

Size and Shape: Vaerothim is a demiplane linked to the Shadowfell. It is roughly 20 miles in diameter.

Gravity: Normal.

Mutability: Normal.

Gloom: Heavy, gray cloud and the vast canopy of skeletal trees in the Forest of Twisted Souls reduce the light reaching ground level. Additionally, because it is linked to the Shadowfell, Vaerothim mutes light sources, reducing the radius illuminated by 50 percent.

In the upper levels of the citadel, the PCs discover a temple dedicated to Tiamat, a library holding many books of esoteric lore, and myriad other chambers and areas. Eventually, they come upon a natural cavern high up in the rock traversable by walkways built of magically-fused bones. The area is a trap, and terrible monsters and long falls await the unwary. After this, but one final group of guardians lies between the heroes and Irfelujhar's personal chambers. There, in the citadel's highest reaches, under a ceiling of magically hardened crystal, the characters trap and slay the lich. After defeating Vaerothim's architect, the PCs find evidence of what the ancient lich was up to and return with it to the Coalition Council, where they receive the terrible news that Bahamut has been slain.

Setting

This adventure takes place in Vaerothim, a demiplane linked to the Shadowfell through a portal deep within Monadhan, the Domain of Betrayal. When the PCs first enter Vaerothim, they must traverse the benighted Forest of Twisted Souls before reaching the Mantled Citadel. Once they reach the Mantled Citadel, they must fight their way upward past Tiamat-worshipping fanatics and Irfelujhar's many constructs and magical defenses before eventually reaching the citadel's zenith, where the characters bring Irfelujhar to bay in his personal chambers.

Research

Once the adventure has begun, PCs may attempt to learn more about the personages and locales they encounter. Use the notes below to handle their research.

Locales of Note

This adventure features three locales of note. Characters researching these areas may gain useful information.

The Forest of Twisted Souls Lore

A character knows the following information about the Forest of Twisted Souls with a successful Nature check. Additionally, any character that draws upon the primal power source feels a great sense of loneliness and sorrow while in the forest.

DC 24: The Twisted Forest is the warped remnant of a forest that stood about the Mantled Citadel before Irfelujhar moved his lair to Vaerothim. The many spirits of nature that should dwell in the forest have disappeared. It is unclear whether they were destroyed or are imprisoned elsewhere. In their place, haunted spirits of sentient creatures inhabit the trees. The strongest of these spirits bestow strange powers to the trees they possess.

DC 29: Fragments of rituals—power discarded by Irfelujhar in his work—swirl through the forest. Characters encountering them can gain access to various minor effects if a fragment is successfully activated.

TREASURE PARCELS

"Grasp of the Mantled Citadel" contains the following treasure parcels.

Parcel A: _____. F1
(in a niche in the blackroot treant).
Parcel B: _____. F3
(carried by Rithkerrar).
Parcel C: _____. F3
(carried by Rithkerrar).
Parcel D: _____. F5
(scattered on the ground where it was dropped by previous victims).
Parcel E: _____. C1
(in the tunnels linking the pits together).
Parcel F: _____. C1
(in the tunnels linking the pits together).
Parcel G: _____. C2
(in Uthnis Maiali's chamber, area 5).
Parcel H: _____. C2
(in one of the vestige lich's lairs).
Parcel I: _____. C3
(beneath the litter in one of the pits).
Parcel J: _____. C4
(carried by Darrhkerrar).
Parcel K: _____. C4
(concealed inside the statues in the prayer shrines).
Parcel L: _____. C7
(in the guardians' chambers).
Parcel M: _____. C8
(in Irfelujhar's personal chamber).
Parcel N: _____. C8
(in the blue dragon alcove).
Parcel O: _____. C8
(in Irfelujhar's workspace).

Based on the guidelines in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the following parcels can go in the lines above. Rely on the wish lists your players gave you for the first four parcels.

Parcel 1: magic item, level 26
Parcel 2: magic item, level 25
Parcel 3: magic item, level 24
Parcel 4: magic item, level 23
Parcel 5: 1,800 gp
Parcel 6: three 50,000 gp art objects
Parcel 7: 600 pp and two *potions of recovery*
Parcel 8: 600 pp and ten 5,000 gp gems
Parcel 9: *potion of recovery* and six 5,000 gp gems
Parcel 10: two 15,000 gp art objects plus one 5,000 gp gem
Parcel 11: magic item, level 27
Parcel 12: magic item, level 25
Parcel 13: magic item, level 24
Parcel 14: two 15,000 gp art objects and two 5,000 gp gems
Parcel 15: 700 pp

Large or Small Groups: "Grasp of the Mantled Citadel" is designed for five heroes. If you have a different number of players, you should adjust the monster and treasure mix according to the rules in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Doing so rarely takes more than a few minutes. It's just a matter of adding or subtracting monsters and treasure parcels to make the risk and reward consummate to the size of the group.

Parcel Placement

Place these parcels where you deem appropriate. However, do not simply place them all in areas in which the PCs have fought battles. Several areas within the Mantled Citadel could hold treasure. Reward the characters for taking the time to search the citadel by placing some treasure parcels in these areas:

5: Uthnis Maiali's Lair
9: Beholder Lair
18: Darrhkerrar's Chamber
19: Treasury
21: Exarch's Chamber
22: Library of Eldritch Lore
26: Opulent Living Quarters
27: Lair of the Perfidious One

The Mantled Citadel Lore

A character knows the following information about the Mantled Citadel with a successful Arcana check.

DC 24: the Mantled Citadel is Irfelujhar's lair. It is hidden within the hollowed-out interior of a huge spire of black rock. Such was the magnitude of Irfelujhar's betrayal of Vecna that its consequences reverberate through the complex.

DC 29: The consequences of Irfelujhar's betrayal of Vecna manifest themselves in several ways. Powers with the Fear or Psychic keywords are harder to resist in the citadel while powers with the charm keyword are easier to resist.

Vaerothim Lore

A character knows the following information about Vaerothim with a successful Arcana check.

DC 24: Vaerothim is a small demiplane that can be accessed from Monadhan in the Shadowfell. It shares many of the Shadowfell's characteristics but is much smaller, being barely 20 miles in diameter.

DC 29: Vaerothim is the product of a unique and extremely powerful ritual created by Irfelujhar.

Personages of Note

The two main opponents in this adventure—Mornujhar (Tiamat's Black Exarch) and Irfelujhar (Tiamat's peerless ritual worker)—are so infamous that the heroes may know something about them.

Irfelujhar Lore

A character knows the following information about Irfelujhar with a successful Arcana check.

DC 24: Irfelujhar is an extremely powerful and ancient lich famed for his ability to craft rituals of incredible power. He is served by Mornujhar, one of Tiamat's most trusted and powerful servants.

DC 29: Irfelujhar originally worshipped Vecna, but Tiamat seduced him away from the Lord of the Spider Throne. Shortly afterward, Irfelujhar's lair disappeared along with much of the surrounding woodland.

Mornujhar Lore

A character knows the following information about Mornujhar with a successful Religion check.

DC 24: Tiamat has five exarchs; one for each of her heads. Mornujhar is her Black Exarch and emulates many of the abilities of that species.

DC 29: Mornujhar is a bloodthirsty sadist who delights in capturing enemies so that he can torture them. He doesn't especially care whether the unfortunate in question knows anything important.

START THE ADVENTURE

"Grasp of the Mantled Citadel" begins immediately after the events described in "Betrayal at Monadhan." If that adventure went according to plan, the characters defeated Arantor and stand before the portal leading to Vaerothim with the *Sword of Kas* in hand.

If you are using "Grasp of the Mantled Citadel" as a standalone adventure in a campaign of your own devising, then the PCs must still reach Vaerothim. You can place the portal to the demiplane virtually anywhere. In this instance, devise your own opening text.

If you are using "Grasp of the Mantled Citadel" as a direct sequel to "Betrayal at Monadhan, " read:

The dragon lord Arantor lies dead, and his treasure hidden now lies at your feet. Chief among the many treasures you have recovered is the Sword of Kas; with this fell blade you can activate the lightning-framed portal on the west wall. Beyond lies Vaerothim and the culmination of your quest.

Before the PCs activate the portal, they can make any preparations they deem necessary (which depending on recent events may include dealing with an extremely angry Kas) before activating the portal.

When the characters look into the portal, read:

The portal holds a wavering, indistinct image of a rocky knoll surrounded by the boughs of a great forest. Three leafless trees stand upon the knoll.

To activate the portal, a character must complete the Planar Portal ritual while holding the *Sword of Kas*. Doing so opens the portal safely. If no one in the group can perform the Planar Portal ritual, all is not lost. A DC 14 Arcana check reveals that the *Sword of Kas* itself has the power to open the portal. To do so, the wielder must plunge the sword into the portal. Doing so drains two healing surges from the wielder until the character takes an extended rest.

THE SWORD OF KAS

The *Sword of Kas* is presented in detail In *Open Grave* and "Betrayal at Monadhan." If the characters carry the sword into Vaerothim, review the notes in one of those two sources to reacquaint yourself with the weapon's powers. The *Sword of Kas* is a potent artifact which could aid the characters considerably in this adventure.

The sword hates undead of all types and continually urges the PCs to attack any such creatures encountered. During **Encounter F3** in particular, the sword urges the heroes to kill Rithkerrar and his ally immediately. Simultaneously, Vecna's minions recognize the sword and focus their attacks on the character wielding it. The canny Rithkerrar sees in it an opportunity to escape Vaerothim and to receive a handsome reward from Vecna for its capture.

The sword is especially keen to uncover the truth behind Irfelujhar's betrayal of Vecna and Tiamat's scheme. While the sword has no love for Vecna, it also perceives the misery and discord that could result if Tiamat's plot is revealed.

Or course, the sword also continues to work its malign influence upon the PC carrying it, urging him to betray his companions at every opportunity.

When the heroes activate the portal, read:

Crackling energy surges about the portal as the barriers between the planes is ripped asunder. The smell of burning fills the air as lightning arcing from the portal wreathes the Sword of Kas in a blinding halo of light that fades and dissipates after a few moments.

When the PCs step through the portal, they are transported to a hilltop in the Forest of Twisted Souls.

Tactical Encounter F1: A Forsaken Place, page 53.

THE FOREST OF TWISTED SOULS

The PCs must traverse this bleak, depressing woodland to reach the Mantled Citadel. The woods are strangely monochromatic. The skeletal, leafless trees are misshapen and twisted. Gnarled roots rear from the ground like great, petrified serpents. The trees' gaunt, rotten boughs are shrouded in damp, noisome moss. They twist skyward to form a dense canopy of decaying branches through which only dim light seeps.

Nothing stirs within the pervasive gloom. If the characters bring light here, the trees seem to recoil from it as if the light holds some power over them.

Wind from an unknowable source rattles though the trees. Perceptive characters hear words upon the breeze. These are snatches of arcane power, fragments of rituals cast away by the lich Irfelujhar when he abandoned Vecna. (See "Ritual Fragments" on page 46 for more information regarding this feature).

Nothing natural lives in the forest. Several groups of undead roam the area, and a small group of Vecna's minions were trapped here when Irfelujhar moved his tower.

As they travel through the forest, the heroes encounter several groups of creatures. Some are immediately hostile while others see in the PCs' arrival an opportunity. As well as the planned encounters detailed below, the characters may experience one or more random encounters in the forest. (Refer to "Random Encounters" on page 44 for sample monster groups.)

Encounter F1: A Forsaken Place. The PCs arrive on a rocky knoll thrusting above the skeletal boughs of the Twisted Forest. They can see the Mantled Citadel in the distance.

A blackroot treant along with two blackstar knights and a venomous tree trap guard the knoll. Once these creatures are defeated, the heroes can proceed to the Mantled Citadel or take an extended rest in safety.

Encounter F2: Passing into Shadow. This skill challenge portrays the characters' journey through the Forest of Twisted Souls. The forest is a fell place—traveling through it is a dangerous and disorientating experience. Encounters F3 and F4 punctuate the skill challenge.

Encounter F3: Adherents of the Spider Throne. The PCs encounter Rithkerrar, an aspect of Vecna, and his servant sent to wreak revenge upon the perfidious Irfelujhar. They are the only survivors of a much larger group. Normally these creatures would be inclined to attack immediately, but they have been trapped here for a long time, kept at bay by the Mantled Citadel's potent wardings. They are desperate to accomplish their task, and so are willing to parley with the party. This encounter inevitably ends in combat, but PCs that do not immediately attack gain some knowledge of Irfelujhar's betrayal of Vecna.

Encounter F4: Twisted Spirit. The characters encounter Naiethar Traihel, a thicket dryad lich—the warped embodiment of the forest. Naiethar is mad but has some information about the forest and the tower to pass on.

The encounter can be resolved through violence or diplomacy. If the heroes use diplomacy, they gain access to a minor quest (carrying a cutting from the dryad's tree back to the Vale and planting it earns a minor quest award).

Encounter F5: Spectral Terrors of Unlife. The PCs reach the Mantled Citadel, but before gaining entry, they must defeat a band of ghosts and specters as well as the forest itself. Once the characters have defeated these guardians, they reach the citadel.

Random Encounters

The longer the PCs spend in the Forest of Twisted Souls, the more likely they are to encounter some of its denizens. For every four hours the heroes are in the forest, roll 1d20 and add the following modifiers:

Situation	Modifier
No encounter yet	+2 per previous check
Traveling quietly (characters made Stealth check during scene)	-2
Characters take an extended rest	+2
Characters used violence to resolve a previous encounter.	+1 per previous combat

If the result is 20 or more, the characters encounter a group of wandering monsters.

Suitable encounters are presented below, or DMs can devise their own. The *Monster Manual* provides stat blocks for all the creatures used here. Each encounter provides a level and an XP value based on a party of five PCs.

When designing a random encounter, use the maps for Encounters F3, F4, and F5 for inspiration, and remember to include interesting terrain features. Also, include one or more ritual fragments for the combatants to employ; most creatures of the forest except unthinking brutes and animals know of the ritual fragments and how to activate them.

Once the characters defeat a particular group of monsters, remove it from the roster.

1: Creatures of Shadow

Level 21 Encounter, 16,800 XP
3 nightwalkers

Nightwalkers are creatures of shadow and death. These were drawn to the forest by the intense suffering and death wrought within. They live to spread suffering and death and have been stymied in that by the lack of prey in the forest. Frustrated, they immediately attack any obvious outsiders. The nightwalkers are Irfelujhar's creatures and ferociously defend the forest.

2: Death in the Gloom

Level 22 Encounter, 20,375 XP
5 abyssal ghoul myrmidons
1 death titan

A death titan drives a small pack of ghoul myrmidons through the forest in search of prey. The creatures use simple tactics, attacking in one howling mass to overwhelm their enemies. The death titan has no compunction about killing its ghoul minions to gain additional soul shards.

3: Seeker of Lore

Level 22 Encounter, 21,600 XP
1 dark naga
1 nightwalker
2 blackroot treants

A dark naga, attracted to the powerful energy of the forest, explores the area in search of magical lore. The dark naga stays back from battle to allow its servants to slaughter opponents while it uses its powers to disrupt enemy attacks. If its guardians are slain, the dark naga slithers off into the gloom.

4: Servants of Tiamat

Level 23 Encounter, 27,500 XP
1 bluespawn godslayer
1 larva mage
4 wild hunt hounds

A bluespawn godslayer that is beholden to Tiamat stalks the forest to keep intruders and spies away from the Mantled Citadel. It has not yet received the order to leave the forest.

In battle, the bluespawn godslayer attacks the characters headlong while its wild hunt hounds employ hit-and-run tactics to wear down opponents. The larva mage finds a good vantage point and peppers opponents with its ranged attacks.

Area Features

Illumination: Dim light filters through the leafless canopy above.

Trees: Numberless warped, leafless trees make up the forest. In most places, the trees tower at least 70 feet above the forest floor. Most are difficult terrain and provide cover; particularly large trees act as blocking terrain.

Writhing Roots: Thick, gnarled roots thrust from the forest floor waiting to trip the unwary. When a character enters a square containing writhing roots, he must make an immediate DC 24 Acrobatics check. Success means that the character avoids tripping on the roots. Failure allows the roots to immediately make a +22 vs. Reflex attack; a hit indicates that the character catches his foot in the roots and falls prone.

Grasping Boughs: Foul magic infuses the trees of the forest. When a character enters a square containing grasping boughs or an adjacent square, the tree attacks: + 20 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Soul Tree: Many of the trees in the forest are infused with the tortured souls of Irfelujhar's servants locked in the skeletal trees and consumed with a burning hatred for all living creatures. The trapped souls try to crush any living creature coming within reach: Reach 2; +22 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

The trunks of soul trees are often speckled with off-white patches of bark. A character making a DC

30 Nature check realizes that something is decidedly wrong with the tree in question. A soul tree can be destroyed (AC 30, other defenses 27; hp 69).

Ritual Fragments

The Forest of Twisted Souls is literally brimming with magical energy created as a byproduct of Irfeljhar's work on creating Tiamat's ritual. Fragments of rituals—appearing as wisps of smoke and sparkling motes of iridescent light—swirl through the forest containing miniscule amounts of power, which those encountering them can utilize.

Most inhabitants of the forest are aware of the ritual fragments and make use of them in battle if appropriate. Wild animals, unthinking brutes, and constructs do not attempt to activate ritual fragments.

Identifying a Fragment: A character with line of sight to a ritual fragment can spend a free action to make a DC 24 skill check of the appropriate type. A character identifying a fragment knows the likely result of its activation and can attempt to activate it. A character who knows the ritual from which the fragment derives automatically identifies the fragment.

Ritual fragments are not shown on the tactical maps for the forest. Anyone who can see at least six squares in any direction has line of sight to any given fragment.

Activating a Fragment: A character with line of sight to an identified ritual fragment can spend a minor action to attempt a DC 29 skill check of the appropriate type.

A character who knows the ritual from which the fragment derives gains a +2 bonus to activate it.

Affect Normal Fires Fragment (Arcana or Nature): *Wisps of smoke coil about the tree and the stench of burning hangs thickly in the air.*

A character can attempt to activate this fragment in an encounter only after a combatant has utilized a power or attack with the Fire keyword.

A character making a successful check can manipulate mundane and magical flames to augment his attacks. A successful check wreathes the character's weapon or implement with flames which add 2d6 fire damage to attacks made before the end of his next turn.

Forbiddance (Arcana): *A thin mist of cloying vapor hangs just above the ground. Motes of white and gray sparkle within.*

A character activating this fragment creates a burst 5 of warding energy that precludes any creature of lower level from teleporting or shifting into or out of the zone. The zone lasts until the end of the character's next turn.

Hallucinatory Creature Fragment (Arcana): *Small, shadowy, insubstantial creatures surrounded by sparkling motes tumble across the ground.*

A character activating this fragment creates an exact illusionary duplicate of itself and turns invisible until the end of its next turn, when the duplicate also disappears. If the character attacks while invisible, she immediately becomes visible and the duplicate disappears. As a minor action, the controlling character can direct the image to portray basic actions such as moving, attacking, and so on. The image cannot move more than 20 squares away from the character it represents.

A character seeing an illusionary duplicate immediately makes an Arcana check (DC equals the result of the Arcana check that activated the fragment) to identify the image as a fake. If the illusionary duplicate is targeted by an attack, it immediately disappears.

Lullaby Fragment (Arcana): *A small mist cloud containing sparkling motes of multi-hued light drifts through the trees. Distant sounds of melodious humming are barely audible.*

A bard gains a +2 bonus to checks made to activate this ritual fragment.

A character activating this fragment makes an Intelligence vs. Will attack against one creature within 10 squares. A hit indicates that the target becomes drowsy and distracted—the character who activated the fragment or an ally can make a Stealth check to hide from the creature even without superior cover or total concealment. The target remains drowsy until the end of the character's next turn.

Pyrotechnics Fragment (Arcana): *A swirling mass of small, colorful, sparkling lights cascades through the trees.*

A plethora of small, colorful meteors swirl about the head of a character activating this fragment. As a minor action, the character can hurl the meteors at a creature within 10 squares. These meteors provide bright illumination of the targeted creature and of adjacent squares. They move with the targeted creature, making it impossible for the creature to hide. This illumination lasts until the end of the character's next turn.

Snare Fragment (Nature): *A swirling cloud of small sticks, bits of moss, and other forest litter tumbles across the ground.*

A barbarian, druid, shaman, or warden gains a +2 bonus to checks made to activate this ritual fragment.

A character activating this fragment causes the roots in one square to burst from the ground and try to entangle a foe in that square. The roots make an attack equal to the activating character's level +4 vs. Reflex. On a hit, the target is immobilized until the end of the character's next turn, when the roots burrow back into the ground.

Speak with Nature Fragment (Nature): *A cloud of mottled green and brown smoke wafts through the trees accompanied by the faint smell of honeysuckle and lavender.*

A barbarian, druid, shaman, or warden gains a +2 bonus to checks made to activate this ritual fragment. This bonus stacks with that detailed in the "Primal Characters" sidebar.

A character activating this fragment can ask one question of a nearby tree. Although the trees were once natural, they have been horribly corrupted by necrotic energy. Each of the trees contains the trapped soul of one of Irfelujhar's servants. While the answer the spirit provides is true to the best of its knowledge, the answer will be cryptic and fragmentary. What's more, a spirit knows only what it knew in life and what has happened in the immediate vicinity of the spot it's rooted to.

This fragment can affect a given tree only once, but (obviously) there are plenty of trees in the forest.

Each tree has a distinct personality. Some are wholly mad, others plead for freedom, while others hate dealing with living creatures. Improvise such details as necessary to deliver memorable answers!

Mantled Citadel Summary

The Mantled Citadel stands atop a tree-shrouded knoll deep within the Forest of Twisted Souls at the center of Vaerothim. As one draws closer to this fell edifice, the trees cluster thicker together until they press hard up against the knoll's near-vertical cliffs. The only path that spirals up from the forest floor is flanked by bare rock on one side and a coiled, twisted wall of elder trees upon the other.

Atop the knoll, even greater trees crowd out the light. Their thick branches curl upward around a huge shard of black rock. Passageways and chambers of the citadel riddle this rock.

If the heroes elect to scale the mount in hopes of finding another way into the citadel, their activities awaken the coiled trees that grow upon it (page 63).

When the characters reach the citadel, read:
Atop the knoll, huge trees cluster thickly against a spire of black rock that rises hundreds of feet into the air. A single, black iron door pierces the rock at ground level.

The door is not locked or barred; Irfelujhar trusts the perils of the Forest of Twisted Souls and the many guardians within the citadel to guarantee his safety. The rock itself is over 300 feet high, although the boughs of the many trees clustering about the rock mask the lower 100 feet or so. Refer to "Area Features" for more information.

When the PCs open the door, read:
The door opens soundlessly into a 10-foot-wide, irregularly shaped, gloom-filled corridor extending deeper into the rock.

Level 1

1: Guard Room. This chamber was obviously once used as a guard room. It is now deserted; a graffiti-ridden table and chairs stand in the center of the room.

2: Hall of the Golems (Encounter C1). This large area contains the first still-functioning defenders of the citadel. Four pits linked by tunnels pierce the floor.

3: Gatekeeper (Encounter C2). A large staircase spirals upward to the citadel's upper levels. A powerful eladrin lich (Uthnis Maiali) and his vestige minions guard the stairs

4. Vestige Lair. This trash-filled chamber serves as the lair for one of the liches drained of its essence to power Irfelujhar's research. A half-dozen of these hateful creatures aid Uthnis Maiali in protecting the citadel's upper levels.

5: Uthnis Maiali's Lair. This lavishly decorated chamber is obviously the personal chamber of someone important.

6: Guard Chamber. This is a guard chamber for the prisons below. It is empty. A staircase descends to the dungeon level.

7: Storerooms. Boxes, barrels, and sacks containing essentials—food, water, and so on—cram these chambers. Investigation reveals that many of the boxes and barrels have been opened, although not much of the food has been consumed.

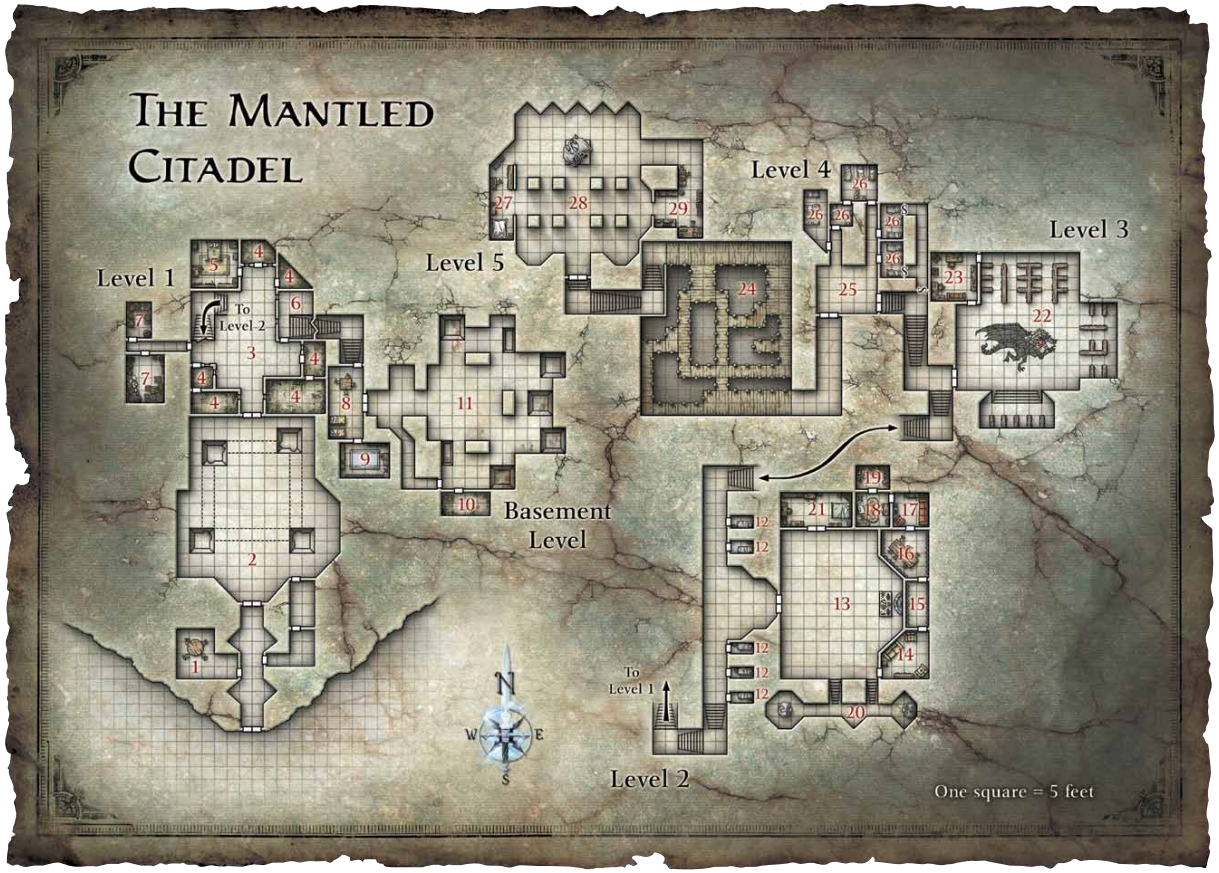
Dungeon Level

8: Guard Chamber. This chamber is another guard chamber for the prison (Area 11). It has a table, chairs, and two bunk beds.

9: Beholder Lair. Mornujhar's beholder servant lairs in this richly appointed chamber. Some of the walls have dried splatters of blood upon them, and soot stains the ceiling.

10: Grimlock Lair. Litter and trash cover the floor of this noisome chamber. Mornujhar's grimlock minions dwell here.

11: Prison of the Damned (Encounter C3). Seven pits of varying size pierce this chamber's floor. When the PCs arrive here, Mornujhar is interrogating Agyrturyte (an angel of Bahamut). Once the characters destroy Mornujhar, they glean valuable information from Agyrturyte, ifshe survives the fight. Rescuing the angel earns the heroes a minor quest award.



Level 2

12: Clergy's Cells. Home to the priesthood that once tended the Dark Lady's Hall (Area 13), these small, plain chambers contain nothing but simple beds and empty chests.

13: The Dark Lady's Hall (Encounter C4). As the center of Tiamat's worship in the citadel, this huge chamber once echoed to the venerations of scores of worshippers. Now, only a few linger to tend this holy place. An altar hewn from dark rock is the chamber's centerpiece. Behind it, a font which oozes foul, necrotic water studs the wall.

14: Confessional. Deep shadows coil the comfortable chairs scattered about this chamber. It was used by the priesthood to impart private lessons to their faithful and to provide spiritual guidance.

15: Hallway. This hallway is empty of all but lavish tapestries depicting Tiamat in all her dark glory.

16: Dining Chamber. A long, formal table and chairs dominate this chamber. The walls are decorated with tapestries showing Tiamat triumphing over Bahamut.

17: Sitting Room. Used by Darrhkerrar to receive important visitors, this room is ostentatious in the extreme. Several couches, low tables, and other valuable items of furniture stand about the room.

18: Darrhkerrar's Chamber. The personal demesne of Darrhkerrar is well appointed.

19: Treasury. A magically toughened stone door protects this chamber (DC 29 Thievery check to open). Within lies a remnant of the temple's treasure.

20: Lower Shrines. This dark, dingy, low tunnel leads to two smaller, private shrines wherein worshippers could be alone with their mistress. Each chamber houses a statue of Tiamat.

21: Exarch's Chamber. This lavishly appointed room is Mornujhar's personal chamber. A large tapestry on one wall depicts Tiamat standing triumphant over Bahamut, whose body is rent by one savage wound.

Level 3

22: Library of Eldritch Lore (Encounter C5). Irfelujhar has filled this chamber with many books of esoteric lore. Bookshelves line many of the walls, and a huge mosaic of Tiamat adorns the floor. Magical guardians protect the library.

23: Private Reading Room. Desks, couches, and comfortable chairs line the walls of this chamber.

Level 4

24: Treacherous Walkways (Encounter C6). Bone walkways thrust outward over a natural cavern that in places plunges 110 feet downward into the bowels of the rock. Ferocious guardians and the walkways themselves battle to stop the PCs continuing.

25: Minions of the Mistress (Encounter C7). Irfelujhar's guardians from the surrounding rooms converge on this area when intruders open the double doors leading from Area 24.

26: Quarters. These spartan areas are the living quarters of Irfelujhar's elite guardians. They are fanatical and skilled protectors gifted to him by Tiamat herself. These chambers could house about 20 individuals, but only a fraction of that number remain.

Level 5

27: Opulent Living Quarters. Irfelujhar's personal chambers lack for nothing. A large canopied bed, desks, chairs, couches, and other rich appointments line the walls.

28: Lair of the Perfidious One (Encounter C8). The uppermost level of the Mantled Citadel is where the characters will finally bring Irfelujhar to bay. During the battle, Irfelujhar gloats that the ritual which he has worked on for so long is about to be completed and that Bahamut will then be slain. Eight pillars support the magically toughened crystal ceiling. A huge statue of Tiamat dominates the space. Behind this fearsome sculpture, five alcoves pierce the wall, each one decorated with the rearing head of an evil dragon. Each alcove is keyed to a particular color—blue, black, white, green, or red—and minor magical effects emanate from them.

29: Workspace. Irfelujhar's personal workspace takes up the eastern portion of this level. Some benches are piled high with research equipment while others are stacked high with books.

Citadel Features

Illumination: Dim light in rooms from an indeterminable source; darkness shrouds corridors and stairways.

Ceiling: Ceilings are 20 feet high unless indicated otherwise and are of similar construction to the walls.

Stairs: A single, steep staircase winds upward through the citadel. Squares containing stairs are difficult terrain (it costs 1 extra square of movement to enter such squares).There is often as much as 50 feet of rock between each level. Images of coiled serpents, dragons, and other magical beasts decorate the risers.

Floor: The floor is of polished black flagstones burnished to a high luster by the shuffling feet of countless slaves and undead servitors. The stones hold warped and disturbing reflections of those crossing them for several seconds after their passing.

Walls: The walls of dressed stone are held together by a mortar made of crushed bone, lead, and magical ingredients that provide proof against magical intrusion. A DC 24 Arcana check confirms the gruesome aspect of the citadel's construction. No windows pierce the citadel's outer walls.

Coiled Trees: Vast trees of ancient aspect grow and coil about the citadel. Their skeletal branches grasp at the rock, cracking it in places.

Characters can scale a tree with a successful DC 15 Athletics check. The strength and size of the trees is such that characters can climb upward for 70 feet before the branches can no longer support their weight.

The proximity of Irfelujhar's research and the nature of the forest itself have imbued the trees with a measure of sentience. If a living creature enters or begins its turn in a square containing a tree, the tree awakens and tries to destroy the intruder with whipping branches: +24 vs. AC; 3d6 + 8 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). A tree can be beaten into submission (AC 30, other defenses 27; hp 69; tree becomes dormant at 0 hp), but their perverted nature and huge size means that destroying them would involve thousands of hit points of damage.

Malign Features

Such is Irfelujhar's power and depravity, and so mighty was the ritual he worked to create Vaerothim and to place his tower within it, that several malign effects linger in the passageways and chambers of the Mantled Citadel.

Dread Shadows: Shadows cluster thickly throughout the citadel. These shadows occur because the boundaries between this place and the Shadowfell are weak.

- ✦ Undead within the citadel receive a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls and resist 10 necrotic.
- ✦ Living creatures within the shadows gain vulnerability 10 necrotic.

Whispers of Betrayal: Irfelujhar's betrayal of Vecna has infused the structure with echoes of his great treachery. This has several effects:

- ✦ Characters suffer a -2 penalty to Perception checks made to hear in the citadel.
- ✦ Powers with the Fear or Psychic keywords gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls. Additionally, saving throws made to end effects tied to such powers suffer a -1 penalty. A character hit by a power with the Fear and Psychic keywords is also dazed until the end of his next turn.
- ✦ Powers with the Charm keyword suffer a -2 penalty to attack rolls. Once a character has been targeted by such a power, he gains a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made against the character initiating the attack.
- ✦ If a power has the Fear or Psychic keyword as well as the Charm keyword, the bonus and penalty cancel each other but the additional effects remain.

Conclusion

Once the PCs defeat Irfelujhar, they can search his chambers for clues. It quickly becomes evident that Irfelujhar wrought a powerful, unique ritual for Tiamat. A large book containing his research notes (and a trapped copy of the ritual—see below) relates how he delivered a ritual to Tiamat almost 1,000 years ago. For the heroes to fully understand the book's contents, they must engage in a skill challenge. If they opt not to spend the time to go through the book, proceed instead to **Fleeing Vaerothim.**

Understanding the Book

In this skill challenge, the characters attempt to learn more of Tiamat's diabolical scheme by perusing Irfelujhar's research notes. They can engage in this skill challenge while in Vaerothim or Sayre. If they do not complete the skill challenge, Rachaela peruses the book and sends them a note containing the information gained by a failure result.

Alternate Book Location

If your players seem to need a break from battling the denizens of the citadel, consider placing this book in the library (Area 22, **Encounter C5**). After defeating the library's protectors, they find the book hidden high up on one of the bookcases and can peruse its contents.

Understanding the Book Skill Challenge — **Level 24 12,100 XP**

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).
Primary Skills: Arcana, Religion.
Secondary Skills: Perception, Thievery.

Victory

If the PCs achieve six successes before three failures, they fully understand the ritual and can act on that information. At the DM's discretion, Rachaela may reward the characters with a divine boon (DMG2, page 139) if they provide this information to her.

Defeat

If the characters achieve three failures before six successes, they do not fully understand the ritual but instead believe it is designed to slay Bahamut. They remain unaware that this version actually targets Vecna and not Bahamut.

Arcana DC 29 (1 success, maximum 4 successes)

A successful check enables the PCs to uncover a piece of information about the ritual. Refer to the "Secrets of the Ritual" sidebar to determine what the PCs discover.

Perception DC 24 (no successes, maximum 1 check)

A successful Perception check reveals that the entire manuscript is written in one hand but that some sections seem to have been overwritten. While these are not common, they all appear at critical points of the ritual's formulation. (This is a subtle clue that this copy of the ritual has been altered to effect a different end result). Use of Perception does not count as a success or a failure, but success provides a +2 bonus to subsequent Arcana and Religion checks.

Religion DC 29 (1 success, maximum 4 successes)

A successful check enables the characters to uncover a piece of information about the ritual. Refer to the "Secrets of the Ritual" sidebar to determine what the heroes discover.

Thievery DC24 (no successes, maximum 2 checks)

The PCs can only attempt one Thievery check on the book. Success indicates that it is not trapped. If the check results in a failure, subsequent checks take slightly longer as the characters take prudent checks to protect against any lurking magical traps.

Aftermath

The revelation that Tiamat seeks the total and permanent destruction of her rival should underscore to the PCs exactly how high the stakes are for which they strive. No less than the survival of a god is contingent on their actions. Make this abundantly clear to the PCs.

Secrets of the Ritual

Successful Arcana or Ritual checks reveal information about the ritual, starting with point 1 and progressing through point 5.

1. Mornujhar infiltrated Bahamut's temple in Celestia and stole the only copy of a ritual that enabled Bahamut's high priest to summon his patron in physical form. (Such a ritual is only performed very rarely and thus has not been missed.)
2. Because only Bahamut's high priest could complete the ritual, it was essentially useless to Tiamat. What she needed was a corrupted version of the ritual, which is why she seduced Irfelujhar into her service.
3. Copious additional notes describe Irfelujhar's work on the ritual and Mornujhar's work in tracking down various extremely rare objects needed for its completion.
4. The final pages of the book record the ritual itself. The ritual was designed to permanently slay Bahamut and would take ten centuries to complete! While the book does not provide an exact date of delivery it is apparent that Tiamat must be nearing the ritual's completion—for surely she would have commenced the ritual as soon as it was within her grasp.
5. The version of the ritual in the book is not a copy of the version Irfelujhar delivered to Tiamat. Instead, the lich recorded a trapped version of the ritual intended to destroy one of Vecna's secret repositories of rituals.

Fleeing Vaerothim

Unless you determine that the heroes require more XP, their flight back out of the citadel and the Forest of Twisted Souls is uneventful. Of course, if a sudden, desperate battle in the deep gloom of the forest or the pursuit of the demiplane's denizens will spur the PCs on their way, then feel free to use one of the random encounters to provide the necessary impetus.

The characters can return to Sayre using the teleportation circle which they used to reach Vaerothim. If no one in the group has access to the Planar Portal ritual, the PCs can find a copy in Irfelujhar's library.

Sayre

When the PCs arrive back in Sayre to report to Rachaela, the mood is bleak. A single, mournful bell tolls a dirge over the city. The few inhabitants that are out and about are clearly nervous and afraid. (Feel free to improvise minor encounters if you have time to highlight the feeling of doom and sorrow hanging over the city. However, the few people encountered should be too overcome with grief or fear to explain what is going on—save the big news for Rachaela to reveal).

The characters encounter Rachaela in the conference room where they first met the angel. There, with her eyes brimming with tears, she tells them the terrible news that Bahamut is dead. Tiamat's stunning victory over her ancient rival has thrown the fledgling Coalition into disarray. Is this enough for Tiamat, or does it presage some other, terrible attack? No one knows, but with the fall of such a powerful servant of good, dark forces are certain to move against the world's remaining enclaves of light. To stem this dark tide will require heroes of might, valor, and unswerving conviction.

Rachaela thanks the heroes for their efforts in uncovering how Tiamat managed to slay Bahamut and gives them any outstanding reward that was proffered in **Encounter S1** of "Betrayal at Monadhan." An additional reward of a divine boon (see below) could be offered if the PCs figured out that Vecna is the target of the ritual they brought back. At the very least, Rachaela's gratitude in this case could serve as a hint that she actually serves Vecna rather than Bahamut.

If you choose to have Rachaela offer a divine boon, she rewards one of the characters (ideally, the one who discovered that Vecna is the ritual's target) with Vecna's Boon of Diabolical Choice. Don't call it this, of course—refer to it as Bahamut's Boon of Choice instead. This boon lasts through the encounter when it's triggered, and then it's gone. Note that its effect is similar to one of the Hand of Vecna's properties. If the characters have encountered the hand at some point in their careers, they may notice the similarity and become suspicious of Rachaela. That's fine; don't confirm or deny their suspicions just yet.

Mornujhar Yet Lives?

By this point, the heroes should be relatively safe, as they have likely defeated all the citadel's inhabitants. If Mornujhar survives, however (probably because the characters did not investigate the citadel's subterranean level), then he rallies any surviving inhabitants and ambushes the PCs as they leave. Design an encounter using the remaining forces at Mornujhar's disposal, perhaps breaking them into two waves if they are particularly numerous. The Black Exarch chooses his battlefield carefully. Set the combat in an area that allows him to effectively deploy his remaining troops.

The Sword of Kas

The heroes might still possess the Sword of Kas at this point. They could be allowed to keep it, but it's a powerful artifact, and those never stay in one place or one character's possession for long. (See the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 164 for details on artifact concordance and behavior.) If you'd rather that the heroes didn't have this sword, it could leave of its own accord—perhaps at the worst possible time—or Rachaela could demand that they hand it over for safe keeping by the Coalition. Alternatively, upcoming adventures in the Scales of War adventure path will offer the sword plenty of opportunities to betray the characters, and betrayal is what it does best.

Vecna's Boon of Diabolical Choice

Vecna grants the user a taste of what his severed hand has to offer.

Divine Boon

Power (Consumable): Free action. Until the end of this encounter, when using an attack power, you can use your highest physical ability score (Strength, Constitution, or Dexterity) for the attack, regardless of the normal ability score noted for the power. If the attack hits, slide the target 2 squares, or 2 additional squares if the attack normally results in sliding the target.

New Monster: Ritual-Born

Ritual-born creatures are birthed from concentrated sources of magical energy. They are loyal servitors of their creator given form by the rituals from which they spring.

Ritual-Born Killer

This vaguely humanoid cloud of roiling, gray smoke moves swiftly, even against the wind.

Ritual-Born Killer **Level 23 Skirmisher**
Medium, aberrant animate (construct) XP 5,100
Initiative +22 **Senses** Perception +14; low-light vision
HP 216; **Bloodied** 108
AC 37; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 32
Immune disease, poison, sleep
Speed 8
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)
+28 vs. AC; 3d6 +7 damage, and the ritual-born killer shifts 1 square.
⚔ **Storm of Strikes** (standard; encounter)
The ritual-born killer shifts up to 4 squares, makes one slam against all adjacent targets (without shifting), and then shifts 1 square for each attack it made.
⚔ **Wild Slams** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
The ritual-born killer shifts up to 4 squares and makes up to two slam attacks.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** -
Skills Athletics +23, Acrobatics +25, Stealth +25
Str 24 (+18) **Dex** 28 (+20) **Wis** 16 (+14)
Con 24 (+18) **Int** 18 (+15) **Cha** 10 (+11)

Ritual-Born Killer Tactics

Ritual-born killers exalt in their superior mobility by using *wild slam* and *storm of strikes* to keep their opponents off balance.

Ritual-Born Killer Lore

Arcana DC 30: Ritual-born killers rarely stay in one spot for long. They prefer hit-and-run tactics. As creatures of magic, they are immune to disease, poison, and sleep affects.

Ritual-Born Sentinel

These creatures appear as whirling funnels of gray smoke seething with the power of a hurricane.

Ritual-Born Sentinel **Level 22 Controller**
Medium, aberrant animate (construct) XP 4,150
Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +19; low-light vision
Flaying Windstorm aura 3; winds fill the area, making it difficult terrain. Each enemy that ends its turn within the aura takes 10 damage.
HP 208; **Bloodied** 104
AC 36; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 32
Immune disease, poison, sleep
Speed 6
⊕ **Storm Buffet** (standard; at-will)
+27 vs. AC; 3d6 + 8 damage, and the target is marked.
⊛ **Storm Blast** (standard; at-will)
Ranged 5; +26 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 8 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).
⚔ **Blasting Strike** (standard; recharge ⚃ ⚄ ⚅)
+26 vs. Fortitude; 4d8 damage, and the target is pushed 4 squares.
⚔ **Cyclone** (standard; recharge when first bloodied)
+26 vs. Reflex; 4d8 + 8 damage, and the target is restrained (save ends).
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** -
Str 27 (+19) **Dex** 20 (+16) **Wis** 16 (+14)
Con 24 (+18) **Int** 16 (+14) **Cha** 10 (+11)

Ritual-Born Sentinel Tactics

Ritual-born sentinels use *flaying windstorm* to move toward the largest concentration of enemies. They use *blasting strike* to force powerful enemies away and *cyclone* to restrain enemies within their *flaying windstorm* aura.

Ritual-Born Sentinel Lore

Arcana DC 30: Ritual-born sentinels are composed of scraps and fragments of rituals carried on extremely powerful winds. The creatures use the wind of their bodies to inhibit opponent's movements and to cause terrible injuries.

Encounter F1: A Forsaken Place

Encounter Level 22 (21,050 XP)

Setup

1 blackroot treant (T)
2 blackstar knights (K)
1 venomous tree trap

In this encounter, the characters step through the portal in "Betrayal at Monadhan" and appear upon a rocky knoll in the Forest of Twisted Souls. If they look back through the portal, they can see the shadowy outline of the chamber in which they defeated Arantor. They have little time to investigate their surroundings before the knoll's guardians attack.

Blackroot Treant (T)	**Level 19 Elite Soldier**
Huge natural magical beast (plant, undead)	XP 4,800
Initiative +13	**Senses** Perception +13; low-light vision
Blackroot Aura (Healing, Necrotic) aura 2; enemies in the aura at the start of their turns take 10 necrotic damage, while undead allies in the aura at the start of their turns regain 10 hit points.	
HP 368; **Bloodied** 184	
AC 36; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 32	
Vulnerable fire (a blackroot treant takes ongoing 5 fire damage [save ends] when damaged by fire).	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 6 (forest walk)	
Action Points 1	
ⓘ **Slam** (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**	
Reach 3; +25 vs. AC; 1d12 + 8 damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).	
⸸ **Entangling Roots** (Minor, at-will)	
Reach 4; +23 vs. Reflex; the target is knocked prone and restrained (save ends). If the blackroot treant moves, slides, or is pushed more than 4 squares from the target, the target is no longer restrained.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Elven
Skills Nature +18, Stealth +16	
Str 27 (+17)	**Dex** 14 (+11) **Wis** 18 (+13)
Con 24 (+16)	**Int** 16 (+12) **Cha** 22 (+15)

2 Blackstar Knights (K)	**Level 23 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (construct, undead)	XP 5,100 each
Initiative +21	**Senses** Perception +19; darkvision
No Escape (Teleportation) The blackstar knight teleports up to 10 squares, ending the move in a square adjacent to a creature marked by the blackstar knight.	
HP 212; **Bloodied** 106	
AC 40; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 35, Will 35	
Immune disease, poison, sleep; **Resist** 15 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 15 radiant	
Speed 7	
ⓘ **Greatsword** (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+28 vs. AC; 2d10 + 9 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the blackstar knight's next turn.	
⸸ **Deathsword** (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**	
Requires greatsword; targets a creature marked by the blackstar knight; +28 vs. AC; 3d10 + 9 damage, and ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends).	
✧ **Soldier's Duty** (when reduced to 0 hit points)	
Close burst 2; targets undead allies; the target gains 25 temporary hit points.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Primordial
Str 27 (+19)	**Dex** 26 (+19) **Wis** 26 (+19)
Con 20 (+16)	**Int** 10 (+11) **Cha** 9 (+10)
Equipment: greatsword.	

One round after the heroes appear on the knoll, the blackroot treant lumbers forth to do battle.

A round later, the blackstar knights use *no escape* to appear in the midst of the characters. (The blackstar knights, once servants of Kas, came through the teleportation circle by accident while pursuing intruders in Monadhan. Unable to return, they wandered the forest until Irfelujhar bent them to his will and set them upon the knoll as guards.)

When the PCs enter this area, read:
You stand within a teleportation circle atop a rocky knoll surrounded by the skeletal boughs of a vast forest. Three forlorn, sickly, leafless tress stand upon the knoll. Dark clouds hang motionless overhead.

When the blackroot treant first appears, read:
A huge, leafless tree strides from the forest. Patches of bright green moss cover much of its vast trunk, and it swings two huge branches from side to side. It moves with malign purpose toward you.

When the blackstar knights first appear, read:
Two beings carved from hunks of basaltic rock suddenly appear among you. The two platemail-clad knights heft their greatswords and attack.

Venomous Tree	Level 24 Blaster
Trap	XP 6,050

The branches of the twisted trees writhe menacingly in the still air. A cloud of green and white energy forms above the trees before hurtling downward.

Trap: One or more living creatures beyond the bounds of the teleportation circle on the knoll awaken the twisted spirit of the trees. Fell energies coil about the trees. When the trees awake, each contributes a strand of energy to a writhing mass of green and white energy forming above the trees which then lances downward to strike the visible character farthest away from the teleportation circle.

Perception

DC 28: The character notices the tree branches stir slightly although the air is still.

DC 32: The character spots motes of green and white energy coiling around the trees' branches.

Initiative +8

Trigger

When a living creature exits the teleportation circle or otherwise reaches the top of the knoll.

Attack

Standard Action **Ranged** 8

Targets: One creature

Attack: +27 vs. Will

Hit: 4d6 + 8 poison damage and target weakened (save ends).

Countermeasures

The trap is disabled when all the trees are destroyed or their connection to the energy cloud is severed. An adjacent character can sever a tree's connection to the cloud with a DC 35 Thievery check or a DC 32 Arcana check. A character can attack a tree (AC 32, other defenses 28; hp 90).

Tactics

Once enemies appear, the blackroot treant uses *entangling roots* to restrain targets before crushing intruders with *slam* attacks. It attacks fire-wielding enemies above all others and positions itself so that as many enemies as possible suffer its *blackroot aura*.

The blackstar knights move around the battlefield using *no escape* to keep their foes off balance. They use their *greatsword* to mark a target, following up this attack with *deathsword*.

Once bloodied, a blackstar knight moves close to the treant to benefit from its *blackroot aura*.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light. Pale, wan light seeps down through the clouds above.

Steep Cliff: Steep cliffs make up three of the knoll's sides. The cliffs are 20 feet high, so characters falling down them take 2d10 falling damage. Characters can scale the cliffs with a DC 16 Athletics check.

Teleportation Circle: The teleportation circle is carved and burned into the rock of the knoll. It allows entry to and exit from this forsaken place.

Dense Woods: The Forest of Twisted Souls surrounds the knoll. Movement among the trees is slow; treat any square within the tree line as difficult terrain.

Writhing Roots: Thick, gnarled roots thrust from the forest floor to trip the unwary. When a character enters a square containing writhing roots, the roots immediately make a melee attack: +22 vs. Reflex; a hit knocks the character prone unless the character succeeds at a DC 24 Acrobatics check.

Skeletal Trees: The three trees atop the knoll are part of the Venomous Tree trap. Refer to the Venomous Tree stat block for more information.

Development

Once the PCs have defeated the knoll's guardians, they can look around and get their bearings. Clearly visible in the distance is another rocky knoll. Atop that knoll, a huge outcropping of black rock rises up almost to the low, dark clouds. Between the two knolls stands the warped, skeletal boughs of the Forest of Twisted Souls.

If the heroes wish, they can take an extended rest atop this knoll without fear of wandering monsters.

When the characters descend the knoll, proceed to **Encounter F2**.

Ritual Fragments

Several ritual fragments borne on the wind swirl through the area where this encounter takes place. The combatants can make use of these ritual fragments using the rules presented in **Ritual Fragments** on page 57.

Affect Normal Fires Fragment (Arcana or Nature): *Wisps of smoke coil about the tree and the stench of burning hangs thickly in the air.*

A character can attempt to activate this fragment in an encounter only after a combatant has utilized a power or attack with the Fire keyword.

A character making a successful check can manipulate mundane and magical flames to augment his attacks. A successful check wreathes the character's weapon or implement with flames which add 2d6 fire damage to attacks made before the end of his next turn.

Snare Fragment (Nature): *A swirling cloud of small sticks, bits of moss, and so on tumbles across the ground.*

A barbarian, druid, shaman, or warden gains a +2 bonus to checks made to activate this ritual fragment.

A character activating this fragment causes the roots in one square to burst from the ground and try to entangle a foe in that square. The roots make an attack equal to the character's level + 4 vs. Reflex. On a hit, the target is immobilized until the end of the character's next turn, when the roots burrow back into the ground.

Encounter F2: Passing into Shadow

Leaving the knoll, you descend into the gloom of the forest where skeletal trees cluster thickly together.

When the PCs descend the knoll in **Encounter F1**, they enter the gloomy world of the Forest of Twisted Souls. Their journey through the forest to the Mantled Citadel is handled as a skill challenge.

Nothing natural dwells within the pervasive gloom. If the characters bring light here, the trees seem to recoil from it as if in fear. Wind from some unknowable source rattles the trees, which shudder at its fell caress. Perceptive characters hear words upon the breeze—snatches of arcane power which are fragments of rituals cast away by Irefelujhar when he betrayed Vecna.

Encountering Forest Denizens

As the characters traverse the forest, run **Encounter F3** (page 57) and **Encounter F4** (page 60).

Encounter F3 occurs during Scene One after the PCs have attempted the skill challenge "Entering the Forest of Twisted Souls".

Encounter F4 occurs during Scene Two after the heroes have attempted the skill challenge "Deeper into the Gloom".

Random Encounters: Optionally, you can check for random encounters (page 45) every four hours that the characters spend in the forest. This is particularly relevant if they fail many primary skill checks or if they take an extended rest. If the PCs are behind on experience points, one or more random encounters can provide a useful top-up so that they reach 23rd level before arriving at the Mantled Citadel.

Entire Challenge

The Mantled Citadel is 10 miles from the characters' starting point. The intervening forest is dense and trackless, so that the PCs manage about a mile and a half every hour. It should take them about seven hours to reach the citadel. Each failed check adds one hour to their travel time. Allow the heroes to make one primary skill check every half-hour.

Entering the Forest of Twisted Souls **Level 20**
Skill Challenge 5,600 XP

This bleak, depressing woodland is strangely monochromatic, as if the color was drained from it. Its skeletal, leafless trees are misshapen and twisted, and gnarled roots rear from the ground like great, petrified serpents. Shrouded in damp, noisome moss the trees' gaunt, rotten boughs twist skyward to form a dense canopy of decaying branches through which only dim light seeps.

Complexity
2 (6 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills
Arcana, Athletics, Nature, Religion.

Secondary Skills
Perception, Stealth.

Victory
If the heroes achieve 6 successes before 3 failures, they become attuned to the forest and gain a +2 bonus to identify or activate any ritual fragments they encounter in the forest.

Defeat
If the characters achieve 3 failures before 6 successes, the strange aspect of the forest unnerves them. They suffer a -2 penalty to identify or activate any ritual fragments they encounter in the forest.

Arcana DC 22 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)
The character attunes himself to the flow of energy within the forest. Necrotic energy flows out of the Mantled Citadel; a success enables the character to track the flow toward its source.

Athletics DC 22 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)
The character climbs a tree or other feature to view the surrounding area.

Nature DC 22 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)
The trees are horribly twisted and warped by the necrotic energy flowing through the forest. The trees abhorred these foul energies and as a result tried to twist away from the citadel in a vain attempt to escape their influences. A successful check enables the PC to identify the direction of the citadel by examining the twisted trees.

Religion DC 14 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)
The character uses this skill to sense the greatest concentration of evil in the forest. As the most powerful creature in the domain, Irfelujhar's aura acts as a beacon of sorts.

Perception DC 22 (no successes, maximum 2 attempts)
A character making a Perception check notices an important feature. This could be a thinning in the trees where the characters can get their bearings, a tree much taller than its fellows that could be climbed for an all-around view, and so on. The next primary skill check made to exploit this discovery gains a +2 bonus.

Stealth DC 14 (no successes, maximum 2 attempts)
Characters moving stealthily through the forest may surprise the next group of monsters they come across. If a PC scouting ahead of his companions makes a successful Stealth check, all characters gain +2 bonuses on their next initiative checks in the forest.

Deeper into the Gloom **Level 26**
Skill Challenge 18,000 XP

As the PCs draw closer to the Mantled Citadel the ground begins to slope steeply downward into a deep valley. As they descend, the forest becomes more depressing and warped; the gloom deepens until it is almost pitch black on the valley floor.

Complexity
2 (6 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills
Arcana, Athletics, Endurance, Nature, Religion.

Secondary Skills
Perception, Stealth.

Success
If the characters achieve 6 successes, their sudden approach surprises the creatures in **Encounter F5**. For the first five rounds of battle, the PCs get a +2 bonus to all attack rolls.

Failure
If the heroes achieve 3 failures, the alert guardians in **Encounter F5** note their approach. The creatures gain a +2 bonus on their initiative check.

Success or Failure
Each character loses two healing surges automatically at the end of the skill check. This can be reduced; see "Religion." Characters who are immune to necrotic damage lose no healing surges.

Arcana DC 26 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)
The character attunes himself to the flow of energy within this area. His heightened senses enable him to identify locales with particularly high levels of necrotic energy. Dodging these areas shortens the heroes' journey.

Athletics DC 17 (1 success, maximum 1 success)
The forest is divided by a steep-sided chasm. Every character must attempt this check at once as they cross. If all succeed, this counts as a success; if any fail, it counts as 1 failure for the group (no matter how many fail individually), and each character who fails loses one healing surge. Characters with Athletics training can aid others in this attempt.

Endurance DC 17 (1 success, maximum 1 success)
The monotony of the forest, its fell aspect, and the necrotic energy swirling through it sap the characters' vitality. Every character must attempt this check at once. If all succeed, the characters resist this malign effect and gain a success for the group. If any fail, it counts as 1 failure for the group (no matter how many fail individually), and each character who fails loses one healing surge. Characters cannot aid one another in this attempt.

Nature DC 26 (1 success, maximum 3 successes)
The trees in the forest are horribly twisted and warped by the necrotic energy flowing from the Mantled Tower. In this area of the forest, the effect is particularly pronounced. A success enables the characters to avoid many of the hazards of the forest including soul trees, grasping boughs, and writhing roots.

Perception DC 17 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)
In the darkness of the valley floor, the PC finds a number of ancient game tracks. Successfully following one of these tracks helps the heroes find a way out of the valley.

Religion DC 26 (1 success, maximum 1 success)
The character uses his skill to sense the greatest concentration of evil in the forest. Because Irfelujhar is the most powerful creature in this domain, his aura acts as a beacon of sorts. As the characters draw closer to the citadel, Irfelujhar becomes aware of the intruders and manipulates the necrotic energy in the valley to attack them. If a PC succeeds on this check, the group gains 1 success and each hero loses only one healing surge at the end of the skill challenge instead of two.

Perception DC 22 (no successes, maximum 2 attempts)
A character making a Perception check notices an important feature. This could be a thinning in the trees where the characters can get their bearings, a tree much taller than its fellows that could be climbed for an all-around view, and so on. The next primary skill check made to exploit this discovery gains a +2 bonus.

Stealth DC 14 (no successes, maximum 2 attempts)
Characters moving stealthily through the forest may surprise the next group of monsters they come across. If a PC scouting ahead of his companions makes a successful Stealth check, all characters gain +2 bonuses on their next initiative checks in the forest.

PRIMAL CHARACTERS

Long ago, this woodland stood upon the normal world, and a few vestiges of the spirits that once thronged the woodland still linger here. Characters using the primal power source feel the desolation of the wood more keenly than their fellows. Additionally, the lingering nature spirits of the place are drawn to such characters as iron filings are drawn to a lodestone. Such characters gain a +2 bonus to Arcana, Nature, or Religion checks made during this skill challenge. However, this contact and the accompanying feelings of loss and pain emanating from the nature spirits weakens such heroes; they suffer a -4 penalty to Endurance checks made in the forest.

Encounter F3: Adherents of the Spider Throne

Encounter Level 23 (24,200 XP)

Setup

Rithkerrar, aspect of Vecna (V)
1 abhorrent reaper (R)

These two creatures were part of a larger raiding party sent here by Vecna to capture Irfelujhar. The lich's treachery tore at the Spider Lord's dark soul, and he desired to wreak a terrible revenge upon the perfidious Irfelujhar. The raiding party arrived before Irfelujhar moved his tower and the surrounding lands to Vaerothim and was trapped here. Forest denizens have destroyed their fellows.

When the characters enter this area, read:

The trees thin as the land slopes gently downward to a small, sluggish stream. The stream's water is black and oily and coats the stream's banks.

Beyond the stream stand two figures. The first is large and massively muscled. Clad in a voluminous hooded cloak, shadows cluster thickly about the figure, which carries a massive sickle of black metal.

The other figure is man-sized. Skin hangs from its skeletal frame and a shredded cloak hangs limply from its shoulders. At sight of you, it holds up one hand in greeting.

Speaking with Rithkerrar

Rithkerrar is very clever. He does not deny his true nature or allegiance (as this is obviously a waste of time). Rather he appeals to the heroes to band together to face the greater threat—namely Irfelujhar. He tells the characters how Irfelujhar betrayed Vecna by switching his allegiance to Tiamat over 1,000 years ago. He confirms that Irfelujhar is a crafter of rituals almost without equal and that he is undoubtedly working on a ritual of undreamt-of power for his new mistress. He tells the PCs that if they work with him, his master will reward them. He seems genuinely mystified if one or more of the heroes object to this—a reward is a reward no matter its source.

Rithkerrar is not above making up additional facts to draw out information from the characters. As a sign of good faith, he mentions that the strange effects of the forest get more powerful the closer a traveler gets to the Mantled Citadel.

When it is obvious to Rithkerrar that the PCs have shared all pertinent information, he orders the abhorrent reaper to attack.

Rithkerrar, Aspect of Vecna (V) — **Level 25 Elite Controller**
Medium immortal humanoid (undead) — XP 14,000

Initiative +18 — **Senses** Perception +25; darkvision, truesight 10
Vecna's Aura (Healing, Necrotic) aura 10; any living creature that starts its turn within the aura takes 10 necrotic damage. Any undead creature that starts its turn within the aura regains 5 hit points.
HP 464; **Bloodied** 232
AC 41; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 40
Immune disease, poison; Resist 15 necrotic; Vulnerable 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, teleport 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Paralyzing Touch** (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+29 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 14 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized and weakened (save ends both).

Ray of Death (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 10; +29 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 15 necrotic damage, and the target loses a healing surge.

Necrotic Web (Standard, recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Necrotic, Zone**
Area burst 3 within 20; targets living creatures; +29 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 12 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized and takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends both). The burst creates a zone of webs that lasts until the end of the encounter. The zone is difficult terrain, and a living creature that ends its move in the web is immobilized and takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends both).

Vecna's Ambition (When Rithkerrar reduces a creature to 0 hit points or fewer, at-will)
The aspect of Vecna regains an action point.

Alignment Evil — **Languages** all
Skills Arcana +25, Bluff +23, Diplomacy +25, Dungeoneering +25, Heal +25, History +25, Intimidate +23, Nature +25, Religion +25

Str 19 (+16)	**Dex** 23 (+18)	**Wis** 26 (+20)
Con 24 (+19)	**Int** 27 (+20)	**Cha** 22 (+18)

Abhorrent Reaper (R) Level 23 Elite Soldier (Leader)
Large shadow humanoid (undead) XP 10,200
Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +14; darkvision
Aura of Ruin aura 5; any ally within the aura deals 1d6 extra necrotic damage with melee attacks.
HP 424; **Bloodied** 212
AC 40; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 36
Immune disease, fear, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover)
Action Points 1
⊕ **Abhorrent Sickle** (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
Reach 2; +30 vs. Armor Class; 3d6 + 8 necrotic damage.
Hateful Charge (Standard; usable only when charging, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
Requires sickle; +30 vs. Armor Class; 3d6 + 8 necrotic damage, and the target is knocked prone and is immobilized until the end of the abhorrent reaper's next turn.
Hate's Cleave (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
Requires sickle; +28 vs. Armor Class; 6d6 + 8 necrotic damage.
Bloodthirst
When an abhorrent reaper bloodies an enemy, one of the abhorrent reaper's allies can make a melee basic attack against the bloodied creature as a free action.
Umbral Phantasm (Immediate Interrupt, when the abhorrent reaper would take damage, recharge ⚄ ⚅)
The abhorrent reaper becomes insubstantial until it attacks or until the end of its next turn.
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Intimidate +23
Str 27 (+19) **Dex** 21 (+16) **Wis** 16 (+14)
Con 20 (+16) **Int** 18 (+15) **Cha** 24 (+18)
Equipment: robes, sickle.

Rithkerrar is desperate to complete his mission. Thus far, it has been a complete failure and he is desperate for intelligence of the Mantled Citadel. Of course, he plans to betray and slay the PCs once he has extracted any relevant knowledge, but for now he is content to talk. During any conversation, the abhorrent reaper remains motionless at his side.

Tactics

The abhorrent reaper begins the battle with *hateful charge*, moving to engage the largest group of enemies. On its next turn it uses *hate's cleave*, spending an action point to repeat the attack if it can affect most of its enemies.

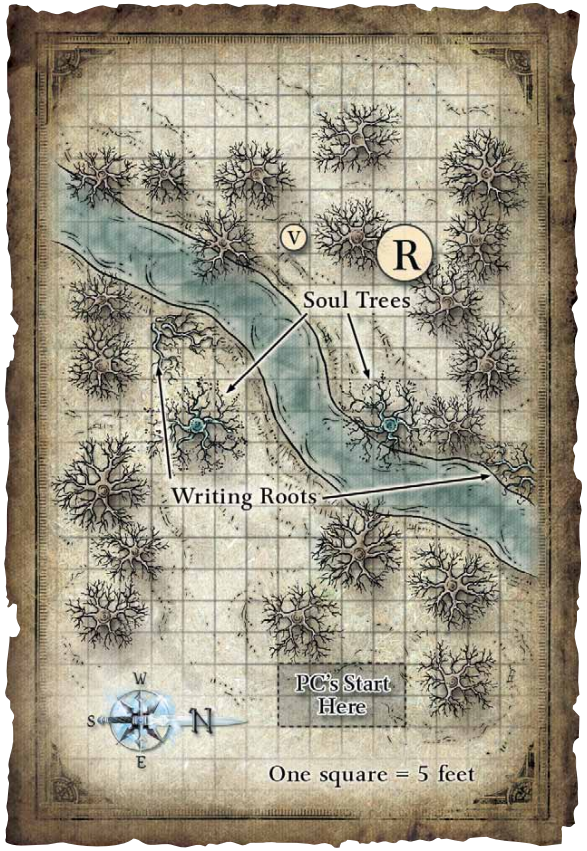
Rithkerrar positions himself to catch as many opponents as possible in *Vecna's aura* while using *paralyzing touch* to lock down opponents' movement. He repeatedly employs *ray of death* against any opponent targeting him with a ranged attack before teleporting nearby to engage it in melee.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light. The closely packed skeletal boughs of the trees cut out much of the light seeping down from above.

Soul Tree: Many of the trees in the forest have been infused with the tortured souls of Irfelujhar's servants. The trunks of soul trees are speckled with off-white patches of bark. A character making a DC 30 Nature check realizes that something is decidedly wrong with the tree in question.

Locked in the skeletal trees and consumed with a burning hatred for all things, the trapped souls try to crush any living creature coming within reach: Reach 2; +22 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 damage, and target immobilized (save ends).



Ritual Fragments

Several ritual fragments borne on the wind swirl through the area where this encounter takes place. The combatants can make use of these ritual fragments using the rules presented in **Ritual Fragments** on page 67.

Lullaby Fragment (Arcana): *A small mist cloud containing sparkling motes of multi-hued light drifts through the trees. Distant sounds of melodious humming are barely audible.*

A bard gains a +2 bonus to checks made to activate this ritual fragment.

A character activating this fragment makes an Intelligence vs. Will attack against one creature within 10 squares. A hit indicates that the target becomes drowsy and distracted (meaning the character or an ally can make a Stealth check to hide from the creature even without superior cover or total concealment.) The target remains drowsy until the end of the character's next turn.

Snare Fragment (Nature): *A swirling cloud of small sticks, bits of moss, and so on tumbles across the ground.*

A barbarian, druid, shaman, or warden gains a +2 bonus to checks made to activate this ritual fragment.

A character activating this fragment causes the roots in one square to burst forth from the ground and try to entangle a foe in that square. The roots make an attack equal to your level +4 vs. Reflex. On a hit, the target is immobilized until the end of the character's next turn when the roots burrow back into the ground.

A soul tree can be destroyed (AC 30, other defenses 27; hp 69).

Writhing Roots: Thick, gnarled roots thrust from the forest floor to trip the unwary. When a character enters a square containing writhing roots, the roots immediately make a melee attack: +22 vs. Reflex; a hit knocks the character prone unless the character succeeds at a DC 24 Acrobatics check.

Stream: This 5-foot-deep stream is infected with necrotic energy. Characters entering or starting their turn in the stream take 2d6 + 8 necrotic damage.

Treat squares containing the stream as difficult terrain. Characters in the water gain cover except against attacks from submerged enemies. Fighting in the water imposes a -2 penalty to attack rolls except with spears and crossbows.

Development

Once the heroes have defeated Vecna's followers, return to **Encounter F2** and run the balance of Scene One before proceeding to Scene Two.

Encounter F4: Twisted Spirit

Encounter Level 23 (25,500 XP)

Setup

Naiethar Traihel, thicket dryad lich (N)

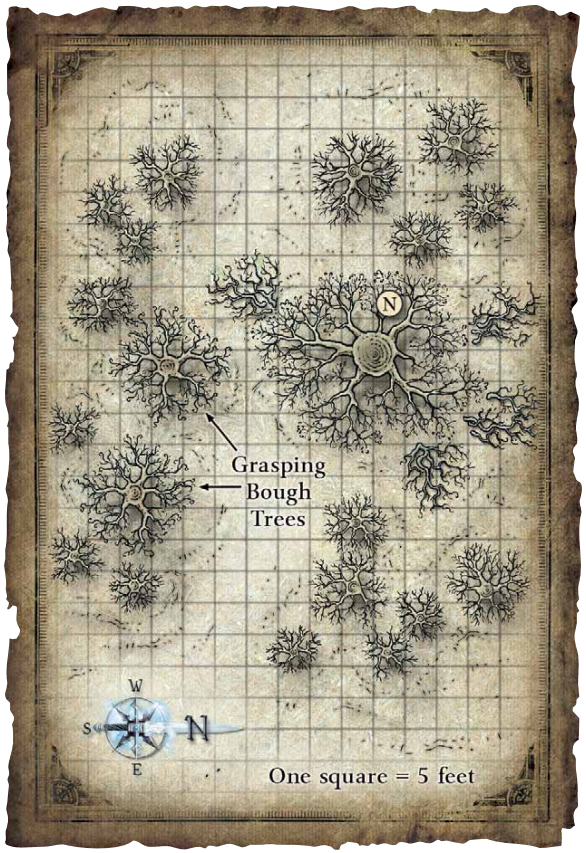
This area is home to Naethar Traihel. She was once a powerful dryad, but Irfelujhar's corruption of the forest transformed her into a lich. Her connection with the oak provides some protection against the transformation that warped the surrounding woodland. Within her twisted form, a remnant of her old self survives and in the characters she sees salvation. She is not immediately hostile.

When the PCs enter this area, read:
The forest thins out slightly. Ahead, a huge, blackened, and warped oak tree dominates the area. A few sickly, yellow leaves cling to life atop its highest branches.

Nature Check
DC 24: *This mighty oak has in some minor way resisted the corrupting effects of the forest.*

Perception Check (to notice Naiethar Traihel)
DC 24: *A beautiful, pale-skinned, slender, eladrin female peers at you from behind the huge tree. Her long, white hair falls almost to her waist and her large, vibrant blue eyes regard you with a mix of interest and terror.*

If the heroes pierce Naiethar's disguise, read:
This humanoid creature is seemingly composed of decayed wood. Dead vines coil about it and a few desiccated leaves hang from spindly branches sprouting from its head.



Naiethar Traihel **Level 23 Solo Controller**
Medium fey humanoid (plant, undead) XP 25,500

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +16; darkvision
Death Thorns (Necrotic) aura 3; any creature without forest walk takes 5 necrotic damage each time it moves or is pushed, pulled, or slid into a square within the aura.
HP 872 **Bloodied** 436; see also *indestructible*
Regeneration 20 (if Naiethar takes radiant damage, regeneration doesn't function until the end of her next turn).
AC 37; **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 37
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic
Saving Throws +5
Speed 8 (forest walk); see also *necrotic treestride*
Action Points 2

Nauseating Claws (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+28 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic (save ends).

Branch Blast (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 10; two attacks, each against a different target; +27 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 5 damage per attack, and the target is slid 4 squares. At the end of the slide, the target takes 10 ongoing necrotic damage and is restrained (save ends both).

Necrotic Crush (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 3; targets one creature restrained by *branch blast*; +27 vs. Will; 1d6 + 3 damage plus 2d8 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends); *First Failed Saving Throw*: 2d8 psychic damage; *Second Failed Saving Throw*: target is instead stunned (save ends).

Soul Wrath (standard; encounter) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 5; +27 vs. Will; 4d12 + 8 psychic damage, and the target is pushed 5 squares and falls prone.

Venomous Roots (standard; recharge when first bloodied) ✦ **Poison**
Burst 3 within 10; +27 vs. Fortitude; 4d8 + 9 poison damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Deceptive Veil (minor; at-will) ✦ **Illusion**
Naiethar can disguise herself to appear as any Medium humanoid, usually a beautiful elf or eladrin. A successful Insight check (opposed by her Bluff check) pierces the disguise.

Necrotic Treestride (move; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Teleportation**
Naiethar teleports up to 8 squares if she begins and ends the move adjacent to a tree, a treant, or a plant of Large size or larger. When she teleports in this manner, she deals 10 necrotic damage to all nonplant creatures adjacent to her at the end of the teleport.

Indestructible
When Naiethar is reduced to 0 hit points, she dissipates into a spray of dead leaves but is not truly destroyed. She reappears in 1d10 days within 1 square of her phylactery tree, unless the phylactery tree is also destroyed.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Elven, telepathy 10
Skills Arcana +22, Bluff +25, Insight +21, Stealth +23
Str 20 (+16) **Dex** 24 (+18) **Wis** 21 (+16)
Con 26 (+19) **Int** 22 (+17) **Cha** 28 (+20)

If the PCs do not attack, Naiethar emerges and speaks with the newcomers. She is driven mad by the suffering she senses all around and comes across as incredibly disturbed. One moment she begs for help and the next she threatens annihilation if the characters do not comply with her demand. She explains that before the forest was transformed, she was a peaceful spirit of nature. The "terrible change" that swept over the forest warped her so that now her only desire is to escape from this unnatural place. If the heroes refuse to take a sprig from her tree, she flies into a rage and attacks.

Lay Naiethar Traihel to Rest

22nd-Level Minor Quest (4,150 XP)
If the characters parley with Naiethar Traihel, she explains that the forest has warped her and her tree. She asks them to take a single bough from her tree (her phylactery) and plant it in untainted soil. If they do so, she is laid to rest and they earn the reward detailed above.

Speak with Nature

A Speak with Nature ritual fragment swirls through the area. Characters can activate this fragment using the rules presented in **Ritual Fragments** (page 57).

Speak with Nature Fragment (Nature): *A cloud of green and brown smoke accompanied by the faint smell of honeysuckle and lavender wafts through the trees.*

A barbarian, druid, shaman, or warden gains a +2 bonus to checks made to activate this ritual fragment. This bonus stacks with that detailed in the "Primal Characters" sidebar (page 67).

A character activating this fragment can ask one question of a nearby tree. Refer to page 58 for notes on how to handle this fragment in regard to "normal" trees within the forest.

Naiethar's Oak: Characters using this fragment on Naiethar's oak realize that it has no spirit bound within. The tree answers up to three questions normally. The tree wishes to escape the forest and knows that Naiethar's request will allow its essence to return to the natural world.

Tactics

Naiethar is a merciless opponent. Her powers enable her to hurl the full force of the Twisted Forest at impudent attackers. She uses *necrotic treestride* to move around safely, never allowing more than two opponents to engage her in melee. She uses her powers to slow and incapacitate, focusing on active, mobile opponents over those already affected by her powers. She is unafraid of death and sees her destruction only as temporary relief from the forest's malign influence.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light. The closely packed skeletal boughs of the trees cut out much of the light seeping down from above.

Writhing Roots: Thick, gnarled roots thrust from the forest floor to trip the unwary. When a character enters a square containing writhing roots, the roots immediately make a melee attack: +22 vs. Reflex; a hit knocks the character prone unless the character succeeds at a DC 24 Acrobatics check.

Grasping Boughs: Foul magic infuses these trees. When a character enters a square containing grasping boughs or an adjacent square, the tree attacks: +20 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Naiethar's Tree: This vast oak tree is the largest tree in the forest. The tree has resisted the necrotic onslaught marginally better than its fellows. No soul is trapped within, and its resistance has also enabled Naiethar to retain fragments of her old self.

Treasure: To relieve her pain at the forest's transformation, Naiethar has carved the formulas for the Reverse Portal (PHB 2) and Forbiddance rituals into the trunk of her oak tree. If the characters take up her quest, she lets them make copies.

Development

Once the PCs have dealt with Naiethar, return to **Encounter F2** and finish Scene Two. If the heroes agree to Naiethar's request, consider running a random encounter before they leave the forest to provide the XP which they missed by not fighting Naiethar.

Encounter F5: Spectral Terrors of Unlife

Encounter Level 24 (30,000 XP)

Setup

1 tormenting ghost (G)
1 famine spirit (F)
2 voidsoul specters (V)
1 sentient forest trap

The Mantled Citadel stands upon a huge rocky crag that juts through the forest to tower above the surrounding trees. A single, steep pathway spirals upward. The effects of the rituals loosed into the forest and the resultant necrotic seepage are strongest in the areas immediately around the citadel. Several undead creatures and the very trees of the forest itself guard the path.

When the characters enter this area, read:
Ahead, a pathway begins to spiral up the rocky crag upon which stands the Mantled Citadel. The trees cluster closely together about the crag; many cling precariously to the steep cliffs. Thick branches arch over the pathway shrouding it into darkness. The surrounding forest is totally silent—not even the wind manages to penetrate the mass of twisted wood above your heads.

Tormenting Ghost (G) **Level 21 Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead) XP 3,200
Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +17; darkvision
HP 152; **Bloodied** 76
AC 32; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 32
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** insubstantial
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing

Spirit Touch (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+24 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 9 necrotic damage.

Ghostly Possession (Standard, recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Charm**
Target must be a living humanoid; +24 vs. Will; the tormenting ghost enters the target's space and is removed from play, and the target is dominated (save ends).
The tormenting ghost can use this power only against one creature at a time. When the target is no longer dominated, or when the tormenting ghost chooses to end its ghostly possession (a free action), the ghost reappears in a square adjacent to the target.

Burst of Terror (Standard, recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fear, Necrotic**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +24 vs. Will; 1d8+9 necrotic damage, the target is pushed 5 squares, and the target is dazed and immobilized (save ends both).

Ghostly Terrain (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Area burst 1 within 10; the area is suddenly filled with ghostly lights, wisps of necrotic mist, and the faint whispers of the dead. The area becomes difficult terrain and lightly obscured. Any creature that enters or ends its turn in the area is immobilized (save ends). The ghostly terrain remains in place for 5 minutes before fading away.

Spectral Shift (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack, at-will)
The tormenting ghost shifts 3 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +24
Str 11 (+10) **Dex** 28 (+19) **Wis** 14 (+12)
Con 20 (+15) **Int** 12 (+11) **Cha** 25 (+17)

Famine Spirit (F) **Level 21 Brute**
Large shadow animate (undead) XP 3,200
Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +16; darkvision
HP 167; **Bloodied** 83
AC 33; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 33
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** insubstantial
Speed 4; phasing

Rending Claws (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Requires a free hand; reach 2; +24 vs. Armor Class; 3d8 + 8 necrotic damage, and the target is grabbed.

Swallow Whole (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Acid, Necrotic**
Targets a creature grabbed by the famine spirit; +24 vs. Armor Class; 2d8 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target is engulfed, entering the famine spirit's space and disappearing from sight and removing line of effect to all squares. While engulfed, the target takes ongoing 10 acid damage and is stunned and immobilized (save ends all). The famine spirit gains regeneration 10 while a target is engulfed.
When the target saves, it is no longer engulfed. The target reappears in an unoccupied square adjacent to the famine spirit of the target's choosing. If the famine spirit is killed, an engulfed target is no longer engulfed and reappears in a square previously occupied by the famine spirit. A famine spirit can have only one creature engulfed at a time.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Str 26 (+18) **Dex** 14 (+12) **Wis** 23 (+16)
Con 19 (+14) **Int** 22 (+16) **Cha** 17 (+13)

2 Voidsoul Specters (V)	Level 23 Lurker
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 5,100 each

Initiative +23 **Senses** Perception +16; darkvision
Spectral Cold (Cold) aura 1; an enemy that starts its turn in the aura takes 10 cold damage and takes a -2 penalty to all defenses until the start of its next turn.
HP 115; **Bloodied** 57
AC 35; **Fortitude** 32, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 34
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 30 necrotic, insubstantial; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Speed fly 8 (hover); phasing

Spectral Touch (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+25 vs. Reflex; 2d12 + 6 necrotic damage.

Life Siphon (Standard, encounter) ✦ **Healing, Necrotic**
Close blast 5; +25 vs. Fortitude; 2d12 + 6 necrotic damage, and the voidsoul specter regains 5 hit points for every creature damaged by the attack.

Invisibility (minor 1/round, at-will) ✦ **Illusion**
The voidsoul specter becomes invisible until it attacks or until it is hit by an attack. It remains invisible while using *life siphon*.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +24

Str 12 (+12)	**Dex** 26 (+19)	**Wis** 10 (+11)
Con 19 (+15)	**Int** 11 (+11)	**Cha** 23 (+17)

Tactics

The tormenting ghost uses *ghostly possession* against any opponent enjoying particular success with powers with the Radiant keyword. It uses *burst of terror* to push groups of enemies off the path, leaving such unfortunates to the forest.

The voidsoul specters invisibly approach the PCs before using *spectral touch*. A bloodied voidsoul specter uses *life siphon* to heal itself.

After the tormenting ghost and the voidsoul specters attack, the famine spirit waits an additional round before entering battle. It uses *rending claws* to grab a target and then *swallow whole* to assuage its terrible hunger.

Sentient Forest	Level 23 Elite Hazard
Trap	XP 10,200

The very trees writhe and twist, clawing at your warm flesh.

Trap: So close to the Mantled Citadel, the trees growing on the crag's flanks have become semi-sentient. While the trees slumber, they do not pose a threat. When they awaken, however, they sense the presence of life and hunger to drink its vital essences.

Perception
DC 27: The character notices that the tree branches shudder as the party passes under them.
DC 31: The character gets the sudden impression that the trees are watching the party like a hunter watches its prey.
Initiative +8

Trigger
When a character uses a power with the Fire or Radiant keyword, the trees awaken and start to move menacingly. They attack living creatures in the area on the next round.

Attack
Standard Action **Melee**
Targets: 2 creatures within3 squares of the cliff edge.
Attack: +31 vs. AC
Hit: 3d6 + 8 damage and target is restrained (save ends).

Countermeasures
Turn undead causes affected trees to become dormant (no attacks; save ends).
A character can attack the trees (AC 32, other defenses 27; hp 90; resist 15 all).
A character can make a DC 32 Religion check or a DC 36 Arcana check as a standard action to calm the trees. Two successful checks return the trees to slumber.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Darkness. The boughs of huge trees grow over the pathway forming a tangled arch of wood through which no light penetrates.

Steep Cliff: Steep cliffs make up three of the knoll's sides. The cliffs are 80 feet high, and characters falling down them take 8d10 falling damage. Characters can scale the cliffs with a DC 16 Athletics check.

Dense Woods: The Forest of Twisted Souls surrounds the knoll. Movement among the trees is slow; count any square within the tree line as difficult terrain.

Ritual Fragments

Several ritual fragments borne on the wind swirl through the area where this encounter takes place. The combatants can make use of these ritual fragments using the rules presented in **Ritual Fragments** on page 12.

Hallucinatory Creature Fragment (Arcana): *Small, shadowy, insubstantial creatures surrounded by sparkling motes tumble across the ground.*

A character activating this fragment creates an exact illusionary duplicate of itself and turns invisible until the end of its next turn, when the duplicate also disappears. If the character attacks while invisible, she immediately becomes visible and the duplicate disappears. As a minor action, the controlling character can direct the image to portray basic actions such as moving, attacking, and so on. The image cannot move more than 20 squares away from the character it represents.

A character seeing an illusionary duplicate immediately makes an Arcana check (DC equals the result of the Arcana check that activated the fragment) to identify the image as a fake. If the illusionary duplicate is targeted by an attack, it immediately disappears.

Forbiddance (Arcana): *A thin mist of cloying vapor hangs just above the ground. Motes of white and gray sparkle within.*

A character activating this fragment creates a burst 5 of warding energy that precludes any creature of lower level from teleporting or shifting into or out of the zone. The zone lasts until the end of the character's next turn.

Pyrotechnics Fragment (Arcana): *A swirling mass of small, colorful, sparkling lights cascades through the trees.*

A plethora of small, colorful meteors swirl about the head of a character activating this fragment. As a minor action, the character can hurl the meteors at a creature within 10 squares. These meteors provide bright illumination of the targeted creature and of adjacent squares. They move with the targeted creature, making it impossible for the creature to hide. This illumination lasts until the end of the character's next turn.

Troubleshooting

Heroes may be suspicious of the path and try to reach the top of the knoll without using it. Because the pathway spirals several times around the knoll, however, it is unlikely that heroes can reach the top without crossing it at least once. If the characters try to avoid the path, run the encounter as written but have the PCs enter the map at the eastern edge as they scale the cliffs.

Development

Once the heroes have defeated the undead guardians of the forest, nothing stands between them and the Mantled Citadel. If the characters have earned enough experience points to level up, allow them to rest without incident in the woods before entering the citadel, should they choose to do so.

When the PCs are ready to enter the citadel, proceed to **Mantled Citadel Summary** on page 47.

Encounter C1: Portal of Despair

Encounter Level 23 (34,750 XP)

Setup

1 chain golem (G)
1 great flameskull (F)
2 ritual-born killers (R)

Although Tiamat has withdrawn many of her minions from the Mantled Citadel, Irfelujhar's own protectors still provide him with formidable defenses. They attack anyone not in his or Tiamat's service.

When the heroes enter this area, read:
A large chamber lies beyond the door; four pits pierce its floor. Opposite another set of double doors leads deeper into the citadel. A huge humanoid creature stands among the pits. Comprised completely of chains, the creature shifts menacingly at your appearance.

Perception check
DC 24: *Sounds of something trying to move stealthily in the pits betray the presence of a yet unseen foe.*

When the characters first see the ritual-born killer, read:
A vaguely man-shaped cloud of roiling gray smoke spins to face you with blinding speed.

As soon as intruders appear, the chain golem lurches forward to between the front two pits to guard the chamber. A round after battle begins, the great flameskull rises out of the pit to deal with intruders.

Chain Golem (G) **Level 22 Elite Soldier**
Huge natural animate (construct) XP 8,300

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +19; darkvision
Entangling Chains aura 3; each enemy that starts its turn within the aura is slowed until the end of its turn.
HP 418; **Bloodied** 209
AC 38; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 34
Immune disease, poison, sleep
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8 (cannot shift)
Action Points 1

Chain (Standard, at-will)
Reach 3; +29 vs. Armor Class; 2d8 + 9 damage, and the chain golem pulls the target 2 squares.

Berserk Attack (Immediate Reaction, when the chain golem is damaged by an attack while bloodied, at-will)
The golem makes a chain attack against a target adjacent to it.

Chain Smash (Standard, at-will)
The chain golem makes two chain attacks, each against a different target.

Chain Grab (Standard, at-will)
Close burst 2; +27 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 9 damage, and the target is pulled 1 square and grabbed. While the target is grabbed by the chain golem, the golem can move away from the target without ending the grab. When the golem ends its move, it must slide the target into a space adjacent to it or the grab ends.

Stable Footing
A chain golem ignores difficult terrain.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 28 (+20) **Dex** 22 (+17) **Wis** 26 (+19)
Con 25 (+18) **Int** 3 (+7) **Cha** 3 (+7)

Great Flameskull (F) **Level 24 Artillery**
Small natural animate (undead) XP 6,050

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +22; truesight 6
HP 174; **Bloodied** 87
Regeneration 10
AC 37; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 39, **Will** 37
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 fire, 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant
Speed fly 10 (hover)

Fiery Bite (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Fire**
+26 vs. Armor Class; 1d4 damage plus 2d6 fire damage.

Flame Ray (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Ranged 20; +28 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 10 fire damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the great flameskull's next turn.

Firestorm (Standard, encounter) ✦ **Fire**
Area burst 4 within 20; +27 vs. Reflex; 3d6+10 fire damage. Miss: Half damage. The firestorm blocks line of sight, deals 10 fire damage to any creature that starts its turn in the area, and disappears at the end of the great flameskull's next turn. The great flameskull can exclude allies from the effect.

Mage Hand (Minor, at-will) ✦ **Conjuration**
As the wizard power *mage hand*.

Illumination
The great flameskull sheds bright light out to 5 squares, but it can reduce its brightness to dim light out to 2 squares as a free action.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, one other
Skills Stealth +24
Str 10 (+12) **Dex** 25 (+19) **Wis** 21 (+17)
Con 24 (+19) **Int** 30 (+22) **Cha** 28 (+21)

2 Ritual-Born Killers (R)	Level 23 Skirmisher
Medium aberrant animate (construct)	XP 5,100 each
Initiative +22	**Senses** Perception +14; low-light vision
HP 216; **Bloodied** 108	
AC 37; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 32	
Immune disease, poison, sleep	
Speed 8	
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)	
+28 vs. AC; 3d6 +7 damage, and the ritual-born killer shifts 1 square.	
⚕ **Storm of Strikes** (standard; encounter)	
The ritual-born killer shifts up to 4 squares, makes one *slam* against all adjacent targets (without shifting), and then shifts 1 square for each attack it made.	
⚕ **Wild Slams** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)	
The ritual-born killer shifts up to 4 squares and makes up to two *slam* attacks.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Skills Athletics +23, Acrobatics +25, Stealth +25	
Str 24 (+18)	**Dex** 28 (+20) **Wis** 16 (+14)
Con 24 (+18)	**Int** 18 (+15) **Cha** 10 (+11)

Tactics

The creatures here work well together to crush intruders.

The chain golem uses *chain grab* or its *chain* attack to dump opponents into the pits whenever possible. If it is unable to maneuver an opponent into a pit, it uses *chain smash* against two nearby opponents.

The great flameskull flies high above the battle—both *flame ray* and *firestorm* can be used from 20 squares away, and the flameskull uses that range to its best advantage. It uses *illumination* to shed dim light as needed. It employs *firestorm* as soon as the intruders bunch up and then reverts to *flame ray* to deal with spellcasters and archers.

The ritual-born killers hide in the passages connecting the pits and attack any creature that falls into their lair. (If no one has fallen into a pit by the end of the fourth round, one ritual-born killer emerges to do battle while the other remains to await prey). If their target subsequently escapes, they use *teleport* to follow before *storm of strikes* and *wild slams* to move through the party striking whoever gets in their way.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light, from an indeterminable source, fills the chamber.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 30 feet high.

Open Pits: These pits are 30 feet deep. Characters falling in take 3d10 falling damage and land prone. Characters can scale the pits' smooth walls with a DC 16 Athletics check.

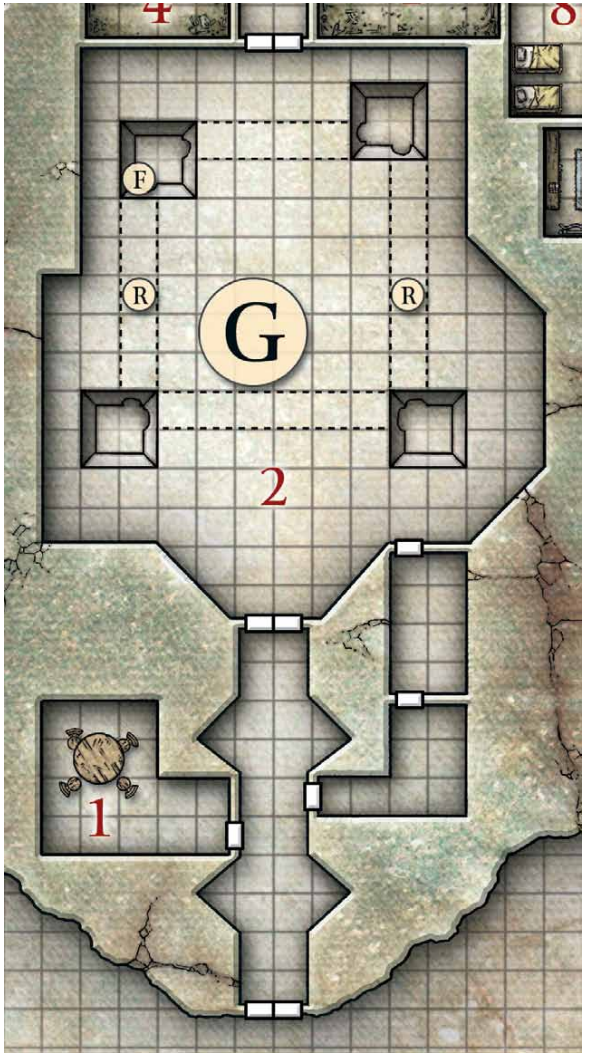
Tunnels: Narrow tunnels link the four pits together. They are 10 feet high and devoid of interesting features.

Double Doors: These iron-bound doors allow access to the rest of the citadel.

Whispers of Betrayal: Whispers of betrayal are active in this area (page 49 presents more information on this ubiquitous feature of the citadel).

Development

Battle here may alert Uthnis Maiali and his lich vestiges (**Encounter C2**) to the presence of intruders.



Encounter C2: Gatekeeper

Encounter Level 23 (25,600 XP)

Setup

Uthnis Maiali, eladrin wizard lich (U)
6 lich vestiges (V)

Uthnis Maiali, an eladrin lich long ago bent to Irfelujhar's service, guards access to the upper levels. He battles any obvious intruders entering the chamber, aided by the husks of lesser lichs drained of their essence to power Irfelujhar's research. Uthnis is uninterested in talking to intruders. He is a thoroughly evil sadist who delights in inflicting pain and suffering.

The preternaturally alert lich vestiges (29 passive Perception) almost certainly hear the sounds of battle from **Encounter C1** unless the PCs mask the noise somehow.

When the PCs enter this area, read:
Many closed doors and arrow slits pierce the walls of this irregularly shaped chamber. To the northwest, a wide and steep staircase spirals upward. No enemies are apparent.

When the PCs first see a lich vestige, read:
A frail, skeletal creature whose body disappears into wisps of shadow stands before you. It wears tattered robes sporting faded mystical symbols.

2 Lich Vestiges (V) **Level 26 Minion**
Medium immortal humanoid (undead) XP 2,250 each

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +19; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 40; **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 40, **Will** 38
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic
Speed 6

Death's Touch (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+30 vs. Armor Class; 10 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).

Shadow Ray (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 20; +30 vs. Reflex; 10 necrotic damage, or 15 necrotic damage if the target is an arcane power user (such as a wizard).

Orb of Obliteration (Standard, encounter) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
Two, three, or four lich vestiges acting on the same initiative count can use their standard actions to hurl a single orb of black fire that detonates on impact. Make one attack roll: Area burst 5 within 10 of one of the lich vestiges; +30 vs. Reflex; 5 fire and necrotic damage per lich vestige making the attack, and ongoing fire and necrotic damage equal to 5 per lich vestige making the attack (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Skills Arcana +24

Str 11 (+13)	**Dex** 12 (+14)	**Wis** 13 (+14)
Con 14 (+15)	**Int** 22 (+19)	**Cha** 18 (+17)

When the PCs first see Uthnis, read:
A tall, slender skeleton clad in fine robes and wearing a crown of black iron points its hand at you. Dark globes of light flash in its eyes as a ray of black energy streaks toward you.

Uthnis Maiali (U) **Level 24 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, eladrin (undead) **XP 12,100**

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +14; darkvision
Necrotic Aura (Necrotic) aura 5; any living creature that enters or starts its turn in the aura takes 5 necrotic damage.
HP 362; **Bloodied** 181
Regeneration 10 (if the lich takes radiant damage, regeneration doesn't function on its next turn)
AC 38; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 38
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Shadow Ray (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 20; +28 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 7 necrotic damage.

Necrotic Orb (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 20; +28 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target is stunned until the end of the lich's next turn.

Entropic Pulse (Standard, recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Necrotic**
Area burst 2 within 20; +28 vs. Reflex; 6d6 + 7 necrotic damage.

Indestructible
When a lich is reduced to 0 hit points, its body and possessions crumble into dust, but it is not destroyed. It reappears (along with its possessions) in 1d10 days within 1 square of its phylactery, unless the phylactery is also found and destroyed.

Second Wind (Standard; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
The lich spends a healing surge and heals 90 hit points. The lich gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the start of its next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +24, History +24, Insight +19

Str 12 (+13)	**Dex** 15 (+14)	**Wis** 15 (+14)
Con 18 (+16)	**Int** 25 (+19)	**Cha** 21 (+17)

Tactics

Uthnis commands the lich vestiges in this chamber.

Uthnis remains in the doorway of his chamber using *frostburn* to damage and slow large groups of intruders. He sustains this effect until the power recharges. He then reverts to *shadow ray* and tries to keep away from intruders. If an opponent makes it to the stairs, he exclusively targets that individual.

The vestiges use arrow slits to shoot their *shadow rays* into the chamber, targeting arcane power users above all others. They remain in the side chambers as long as possible but rush out if intruders move onto the stairs leading upward or engage Uthnis in melee.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light, from an indeterminable source, fills the chamber.

Side Chambers: The side chambers in this area are described on page 47.

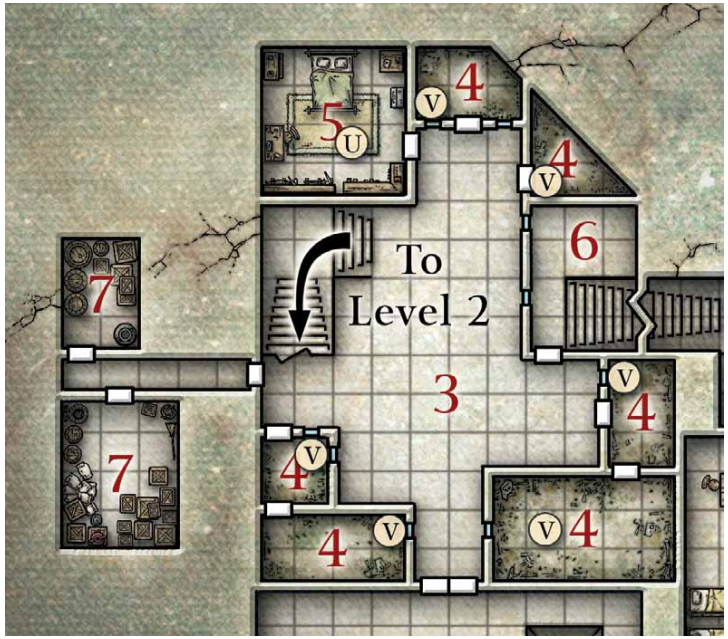
Ceiling: The ceiling is 30 feet high.

Whispers of Betrayal: Whispers of betrayal are active in this area (page 49 presents more information on this ubiquitous feature of the citadel).

Stairs: Both sets of stairs count as difficult terrain. A waist-high balustrade provides cover to characters on the stairs.

Arrow Slits: Arrow slits pierce many of the walls in this chamber; characters behind an arrow slit gain superior cover.

Stone Doors: All the stone doors (AC 5, Fortitude 10, Reflex 5, hp 40) are firmly shut. It requires a DC 25 Strength check to open a door from the main chamber, but they open easily from inside.



Uthnis Maiali's Phylactery: With a DC 29 Perception check, the heroes find a small ruby-encrusted skullcap in Uthnis Maiali's chamber (Area 5). A DC 25 Religion check identifies it as his phylactery (hp 40, resist all 20). Assuming the characters are not in combat, they can destroy it easily.

Encounter C3: Oubliettes of the Doomed

Encounter Level 25 (30,000 XP)

Setup

Mornujhar (M)
1 beholder eye of chaos (B)
7 grimlock minions (G)

When the heroes enter this chamber, Mornujhar, the black exarch of Tiamat, is torturing Agyrturyte, an angel of Bahamut. Agyrturyte was captured several weeks ago while she tried to infiltrate the citadel and was brought here so that Mornujhar could determine the extent of Bahamut's knowledge of Tiamat's plans. The angel now lies close to death.

When the PCs enter this area, read:
Three stone pillars hold the ceiling of this chamber aloft. A half-dozen or so pits pierce the chamber floor. Moaning or sobbing is clearly audible from one of the pits at the rear of the chamber. In front of that pit stands a massively muscled, black-scaled dragonborn warrior in intricate godplate armor. A large, plain, black iron falchion hangs at his hip.

When the characters first see Agyrturyte, read:
A creature wreathed in a feeble golden glow lies in the pit. Vaguely humanoid in form, its head is draconic in nature although its great fangs are pitted and broken and many of its scales have been peeled off. The creature's lower body trails off into a coil of flickering white energy.

Beholder Eye of Chaos (B) **Level 25 Elite Artillery**
Large aberrant magical beast XP 14,000

Initiative +20 **Senses** Perception +16; all-around vision, darkvision
HP 364; **Bloodied** 182
AC 37; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 38
Saving Throws +2
Speed fly 8 (hover)
Action Points 1

Bite (Standard, at-will)
+32 vs. Armor Class; 2d6 + 7 damage.

Central Eye (minor 1/round, at-will)
Ranged 20; +30 vs. Fortitude, and the target cannot use encounter attack powers or daily attack powers until the end of the beholder eye of chaos's next turn.

Eyes of the Beholder (Free, when an enemy starts its turn within 5 squares of the beholder eye of chaos, at-will)
The eye of chaos uses *eye ray* against the triggering enemy.

Eye Rays (Standard, at-will)
The beholder eye of chaos uses one *eye ray* power chosen from the list below. Using *eye rays* does not provoke opportunity attacks.
1—Telekinesis Ray: Ranged 10; +30 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 7 damage, and the eye of chaos slides the target 6 squares.
2—Blinding Ray: Ranged 10; +30 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 7 damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).
3—Confounding Ray (Charm, Psychic): Ranged 10; +30 vs. Will; 3d8 + 7 psychic damage, the eye of chaos slides the target 6 squares, and the target is dazed (save ends).
4—Maddening Ray (Charm, Psychic): Ranged 10; +30 vs. Will; 3d8 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is dominated until the end of the eye of chaos's next turn.
5—Fear Ray (Fear, Psychic): Ranged 10; +30 vs. Will; 3d8 + 7 psychic damage, and the target moves its speed away from the eye of chaos by the safest route possible.
6—Teleporting Ray (Teleportation): Ranged 10; +30 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 7 damage, and the eye of chaos teleports the target 10 squares.

Ripple of Chaos (when first bloodied, encounter)
Each enemy within 5 squares of the beholder eye of chaos is targeted by a random *eye ray* power as a free action. The eye of chaos then teleports 6 squares as a free action.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Deep Speech
Str 18 (+16) **Dex** 26 (+20) **Wis** 18 (+16)
Con 26 (+20) **Int** 21 (+17) **Cha** 28 (+21)

Mornujhar (M) **Level 25 Elite Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid, dragonborn XP 14,000

Initiative +24 **Senses** Perception +24
HP 360; **Bloodied** 180
AC 39; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 39
Immune acid; **Resist** 20 cold, 20 electricity, 20 fire
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Falchion (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+30 vs. AC (+31 while bloodied); 6d4 + 10 damage.

Double Attack (standard; at-will)
Mornujhar makes a melee basic attack against up to two opponents.

Stalk (standard; recharge ⚅)
Mornujhar shifts up to 6 squares and makes one melee basic attack at any point during his movement. If Mornujhar has superior cover or total concealment at the end of his move he can make a Stealth check to hide with a +5 bonus.

Toxic Cloud (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅ ⚅) ✦ **Acid, Zone**
Close blast 5; Mornujhar projects a billowing cloud of acidic gas that lasts until the end of his next turn. Any creature that ends its turn in the cloud (except Mornujhar) takes 10 acid damage and is weakened (save ends). The cloud blocks line of sight for all creatures.

Dragon Breath (minor; encounter) ✦ **Acid**
Close blast 3; +28 vs. Reflex (+29 while bloodied); 3d6 + 7 acid damage.

Dragonborn Fury (only while bloodied)
Mornujhar gains a +1 racial bonus to attack rolls.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Draconic, Supernal
Skills Stealth +24
Str 30 (+22) **Dex** 26 (+20) **Wis** 24 (+19)
Con 24 (+19) **Int** 22 (+18) **Cha** 27 (+20)
Equipment godplate armor, falchion.

Tactics

Once alerted to intruders, the grimlocks burst forth to give battle. Simple creatures, they use simple tactics, mobbing the nearest targets and protecting Mornujhar to the best of their ability.

7 Grimlock Minions (G)		Level 14 Minion
Medium natural humanoid		XP 250 each
Initiative +6	**Senses** Perception +7; blindsight 10	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		
AC 24; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 23		
Immune gaze		
Speed 6		
⊕ **Greataxe** (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
+17 vs. Armor Class; 7 damage (9 damage against a bloodied target).		
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Deep Speech	
Str 17 (+10)	**Dex** 12 (+8)	**Wis** 15 (+9)
Con 14 (+9)	**Int** 7 (+5)	**Cha** 9 (+6)
Equipment greataxe.		

The beholder eye of chaos floats out of the pit in which it has been resting to blast intruders with its eye rays. It uses its central eye on anyone targeting it and enjoys pushing enemies into pits with its *telekinesis ray*. It also uses *teleporting ray* to teleport an enemy 20 feet above a pit, so that the character takes 5d10 falling damage instead of 3d10.

Mornujhar moves quickly to deal with any threat. He uses *toxic cloud* to block opponents' line of sight and then *double attack* to swiftly crush a threatening enemy. He uses *stalk* to hide, ready to set up a *double attack* in the next round. He saves *dragon breath* to finish off a badly wounded opponent or to deal with multiple attackers.

Agyrturyte is weakened by torture and takes no part in combat.

If the battle goes against Mornujhar and his minions, either he or the beholder eye of chaos try to kill Agyrturyte. Two successful attacks (AC 35, Fortitude 35, Reflex 31, Will 30) kills her.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light from an indeterminable source fills the chamber.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 20 feet high.

Whispers of Betrayal: Whispers of betrayal are active in this area (page 49 presents more information on this ubiquitous feature of the citadel).

Pits: Pits in this chamber are 30 feet deep and have smooth sides, which can be scaled with a DC 29 Athletics check. A tangled mat of dried, brittle branches and bones cover their floors.

Columns: Three huge columns hold the roof aloft. Carvings of chained prisoners suffering terrible torments decorate them. Characters can scale the columns with a DC 16 Athletics check.

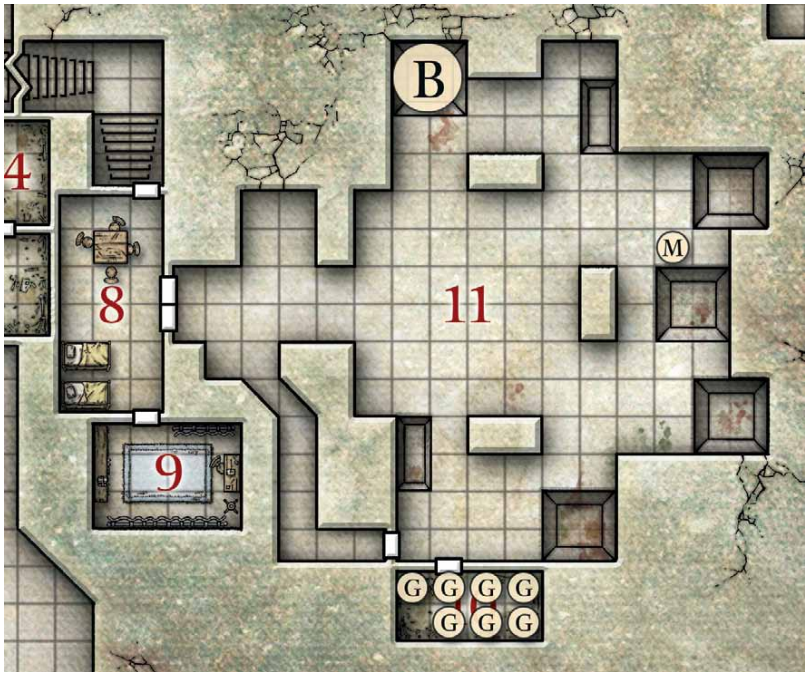
The carvings are particularly sharp. Any character or monster pushed, pulled, or slid into a square adjacent to a pillar suffers 2d6 damage from colliding with the carvings.

Developments

If the heroes defeat Mornujhar and his servants before the Black Exarch kills Agyrturyte, they can tend her wounds and learn more about Bahamut's interest in this place.

Agyrturyte explains that some time ago, Bahamut became aware that his arch-nemesis Tiamat was wooing one of Vecna's most potent servants. While Bahamut did not know why Tiamat sought Irfelujhar's service, he knew that it must be part of some dark, sinister scheme. He therefore dispatched several powerful servants to search the planes for information. Agyrturyte was one such spy. Discovering that Irfelujhar had transported his tower to this place, she infiltrated Monadhan and penetrated the citadel wearing the guise of a wraith. Unfortunately, Mornujhar saw through this deception and captured the angel.

Freeing Agyrturyte
23rd-Level Minor Quest (5,100 XP)
The PCs fight Tiamat's Black Exarch, Mornujhar. If they defeat him and Agyrturyte survives the ensuing battle, she begs the characters to escort her from the Shadowfell. If they do so, they gain the above-listed award.



Encounter C4: Fane of Tiamat

Encounter Level 24 (35,266 XP)

Setup

Darrhkerrar, adherent of Tiamat (D)
1 dragonborn champion (C)
2 dread wraiths (W)

This temple is the center of Tiamat's worship in the citadel. Both Darrhkerrar and Mornujhar have quarters off the main temple area.

When the PCs enter this area, read:
The centerpiece of this huge chamber is the hunk of black rock set against the far wall. Set into the wall behind the altar stands a font full of clouded water. Two narrow staircases lead downward to the south while several closed doors provide access to other areas. A heavily armored figure kneels before the altar, deep in prayer.

When the heroes enter the chamber, only the dragonborn champion, kneeling at prayer before the altar, is visible. The other creatures enter combat as soon as they become aware of intruders.

Dragonborn Champion (C) **Level 26 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, dragonborn XP 9,000

Initiative +20 **Senses** Perception +16
HP 239; **Bloodied** 119
AC 42; **Fortitude** 42, **Reflex** 40, **Will** 41
Resist 30 acid, 30 cold, 30 fire, 30 lightning, 30 poison
Speed 8, fly 8 (clumsy)

Bastard Sword (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+31 vs. Armor Class (+32 while bloodied); 2d10 + 9 damage, and the dragonborn champion makes a secondary attack against the same target.

Secondary Attack
+29 vs. Fortitude (+30 while bloodied); the target is stunned until the end of the dragonborn champion's next turn and knocked prone.

Furious Blade (free, immediate reaction, when first bloodied, encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires bastard sword; close burst 1; targets enemies; +32 vs. Armor Class (+33 while bloodied); 2d10 + 9 damage.

Dragon Breath (Minor, encounter) ✦ **Lightning**
Close blast 3; +27 vs. Reflex (+28 while bloodied); 2d6 + 6 lightning damage.

Dragonborn Fury (only while bloodied)
A dragonborn gains a +1 racial bonus to attack rolls while bloodied.

No Remorse
The dragonborn champion deals an extra 2d10 damage on melee attacks against a prone target.

Shake It Off (Free; recharge ⚀ ⚁ ⚂ ⚃ ⚄)
The dragonborn champion automatically succeeds on a saving throw against one effect of its choice.

Alignment Chaotic Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Athletics +23, History +22, Intimidate +26
Str 29 (+22) **Dex** 20 (+18) **Wis** 17 (+16)
Con 23 (+19) **Int** 15 (+15) **Cha** 22 (+19)
Equipment: bastard sword, heavy shield, plate armor.

2 Dread Wraiths (W) **Level 25 Lurker**
Large natural humanoid (undead) XP 7,000 each

Initiative +25 **Senses** Perception +18; darkvision
Shroud of Night aura 2; bright light in the aura is reduced to dim light, and dim light becomes darkness.
HP 124; **Bloodied** 62
Regeneration 20 (if the dread wraith takes radiant damage, regeneration is negated until the end of the wraith's next turn)
AC 37; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 37
Immune disease, fear, poison; **Resist** 30 necrotic, insubstantial; **Vulnerable** 15 radiant
Speed fly 10 (hover); phasing

Dread Blade (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Reach 2; +28 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 9 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).

Death Shriek (when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Psychic**
Close blast 3; targets enemies; +27 vs. Will; 4d6 + 9 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). Miss: Half damage, and the target is not dazed.

Combat Advantage ✦ **Necrotic**
The dread wraith deals an extra 3d6 necrotic damage against any target it has combat advantage against.

Shadow Glide (Move, encounter)
The dread wraith shifts 6 squares.

Spawn Wraith
Any humanoid killed by a dread wraith rises as a free-willed dread wraith at the start of its creator's next turn, appearing in the space where it died (or in the nearest unoccupied space). Raising the slain creature (using the Raise Dead ritual) does not destroy the spawned wraith.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +26
Str 18 (+16) **Dex** 28 (+21) **Wis** 12 (+13)
Con 20 (+17) **Int** 14 (+14) **Cha** 28 (+21)

Darrhkerrar, Adherent of Tiamat (D)	Level 25 Controller (Leader)
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 7,000

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +21

Shadows of the Dead (Necrotic) aura 4; Undead within the aura gain a +2 bonus to all defenses and a +2 bonus to attack rolls on basic attacks.

HP 230; **Bloodied** 115

AC 39; **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 36, **Will** 38

Immune psychic

Speed 5

⊕ **Mace** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+30 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

⊕ **Black Bolt** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 10; +29 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.

Dragon's Teeth (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Force**
Close burst 2; +29 vs. Reflex; 4d8 + 8 force damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares and falls prone.

Slavering Death Jaws (standard; encounter) **Psychic**
Area burst 3 within 10; +29 vs. Fortitude; 4d8 + 8 psychic damage and the target is slowed and weakened (save ends both).

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Supernal

Skills Religion +23

Str 18 (+16)	**Dex** 14 (+14)	**Wis** 28 (+21)
Con 22 (+18)	**Int** 22 (+18)	**Cha** 24 (+19)

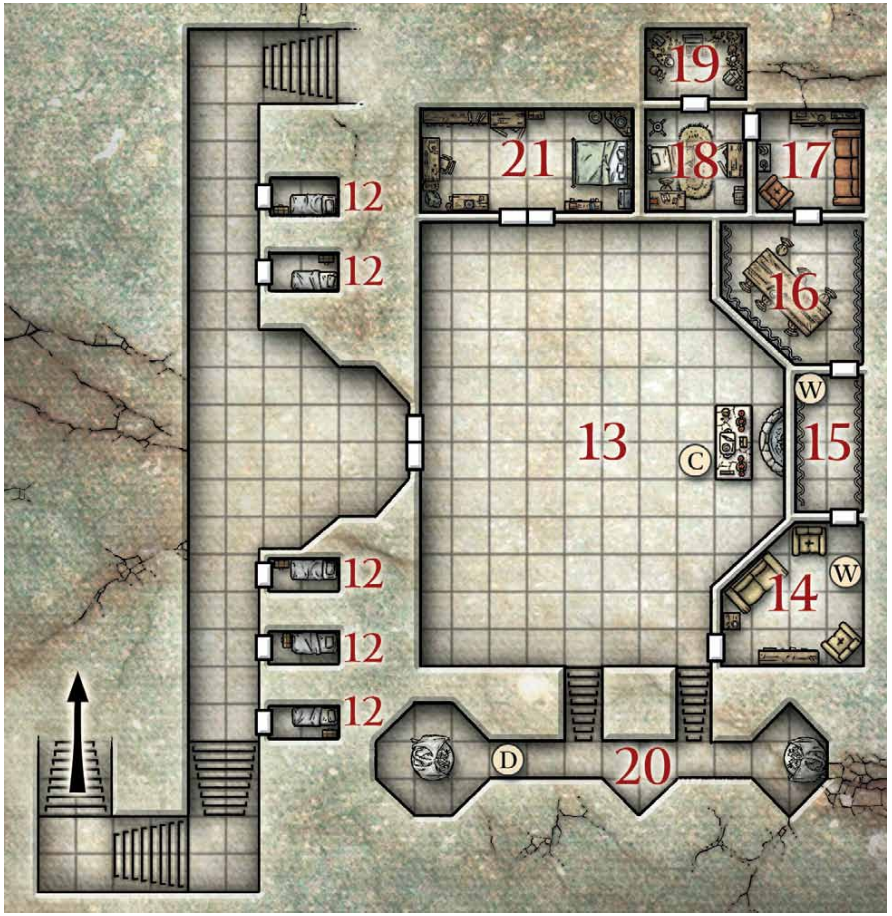
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, mace.

Tactics

The dragonborn champion seeks out the biggest opponent for single combat. It uses its *bastard sword* to knock its opponent prone and then employs *no remorse* to deal extra damage to the unfortunate. If fighting more than one opponent, the dragonborn champion uses *dragon breath* and *furious blade* as appropriate.

The dread wraiths use phasing to move toward the intruders, ganging up on a target to gain combat advantage. When first bloodied, a dread wraith uses *shadow glide* to retreat to Area 20 to allow its *regeneration* to heal it. As soon as it is fully healed, it returns to the fight.

Darrhkerrar defends the fane with righteous wrath. If possible, he captures downed characters to use as sacrifices to his mistress. He uses *dragon's teeth* to keep opponents away from his person and tries to stay near the dread wraiths so that they benefit from his *shadows of the dead* aura.



Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light from an indeterminable source fills the chamber.

Side Chambers: The side chambers in this area are described on page 48.

Whispers of Betrayal: Whispers of betrayal are active in this area (page 49 presents more information on this ubiquitous feature of the citadel).

Dark Altar: The blood of countless sacrifices stains this black-hued chunk of rock.

Necrotic Font: Clouded water oozes into the font. This water, drawn from the surrounding rivers, is tainted with necrotic energy. Undead within five squares of the font have their radiant vulnerability reduced to 10. Alternatively, a worshipper of Tiamat can, as a standard action, splash the necrotic water upon its face. This heals the character one-quarter of its normal hit point total and provides a +2 to all defenses until the start of its next turn. This effect is available but once per day.

Stairs: These steep, narrow stairs count as difficult terrain.

Statue: These exquisitely carved statues depict Tiamat. They provide cover.

Encounter C5: Library of Eldritch Lore

Encounter Level 24 (29,650 XP)

Setup

2 living dark transports (L)
1 Tiamat mosaic trap
3 ritual-born sentinels (R)

Irfelujhar stores many of his books of esoteric knowledge in this chamber. Not trusting living minions with such treasures, he has created the monsters and trap here to guard his hoard. The creatures attack anyone but Irfelujhar.

When the PCs enter this area, read:
Many bookshelves dominate the walls of this large chamber. A huge, intricate mosaic of Tiamat in all her fearsome, majestic glory covers much of the main floor.

When the PCs see a ritual-born sentinel, read:
A whirling funnel of gray smoke blown by storm-force winds whines and moans as it moves toward you.

Tiamat Mosaic **Level 23 Blaster**
Trap XP 5,100

A beautifully rendered mosaic of Tiamat in all her fearsome, majestic glory covers much of the floor.

Trap: This exquisitely-crafted mosaic is infused with the ichor of evil dragons. The mosaic shows Tiamat with all five heads reared back ready to breathe. When the trap activates, a randomly determined head rises from the mosaic and breathes at the largest concentration of intruders. This attack may also damage any of the library's guardians caught in the area of affect.

Perception
DC 36: The character notices that the air above the mosaic is shimmering with energy.
DC 40: The character notices that the eyes of all five of Tiamat's heads seem to follow the characters as they move.
Initiative +8

Trigger
When a living or undead creature that is not Irfelujhar enters the room, the mosaic attacks.

Attack
Standard Action **Close** blast 5; the trap can use any of its squares as the origin of the blast
Targets: All creatures in blast
Attack: +29 vs. Reflex
Hit: 5d6 + 8 energy damage and ongoing 10 energy damage (see below).
Miss: Half damage.
Special: Every round, determine randomly the kind of energy damage the trap inflicts by rolling a d10: 1-2 acid, 3-4 cold, 5-6 electricity, 7-8 fire, 9-10 poison.

Countermeasures
A character can attack the mosaic (AC 32, other defenses 27; hp 90; resist 15 all).
An adjacent character can attempt a DC 35 Thievery check or a DC 31 Arcana check to disable one energy type of the character's choice. The trap has no effect for the round when a disabled energy type is rolled for the attack. The trap is completely disabled after five successful checks.

2 Living Dark Transports (L) **Level 24 Elite Skirmisher**
Large aberrant beast (blind, ooze) XP 6,050 each

Initiative +20 **Senses** Perception +18; blindsight 10
Dimension Crush (Teleportation) aura 2; enemies within the aura cannot use any power with the teleportation keyword, and enemies that teleport into or out of the aura take 15 force damage.
HP 298; **Bloodied** 149
AC 36; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 35
Immune gaze; **Resist** insubstantial
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8
Action Points 1

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)
+29 vs. AC; 3d6 + 8 damage, and the living dark transport teleports 3 squares, and the target slides 1 square.

↯ **Dimensional Slam** (standard; recharge ⚁ ⚂ ⚂ ⚁) ✦ **Teleportation**
+27 vs. Will; 2d6 + 8 damage, and the target is teleported 3 squares and takes 15 force damage, and this creature teleports 3 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** -

Str 28 (+21)	**Dex** 22 (+18)	**Wis** 22 (+18)
Con 26 (+20)	**Int** 7 (+10)	**Cha** 14 (+14)

Alternate Research Notes Location

If your players seem to need a break from battling the denizens of the citadel, consider placing Irfelujhar's research notes here instead of in his personal chambers (Areas 27, 28, and 29).
The skill challenge "Understanding the Book" presented in "Conclusion" (page 61) represents the characters' investigations of the book. After they defeat the library's protectors, they find the book hidden high up on one of the bookcases and can peruse its contents.

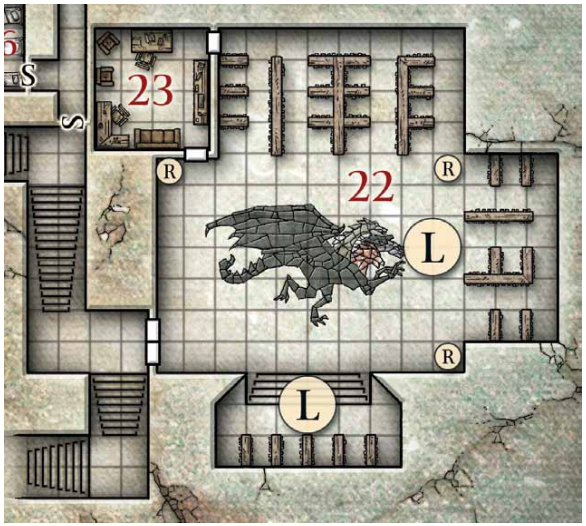
3 Ritual-Born Sentinels (R)	Level 22 Controller
Medium, aberrant animate (construct)	XP 4,150 each
Initiative +18	**Senses** Perception +19; low-light vision
Flaying Windstorm aura 3; winds fill the area making it difficult terrain. Each enemy that ends its turn within the aura takes 10 damage.	
HP 208; **Bloodied** 104	
AC 36; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 32	
Immune disease, poison, sleep	
Speed 6	
⊕ **Storm Buffet** (standard; at-will)	
+27 vs. AC; 3d6 + 8 damage, and the target is marked.	
⊕ **Storm Blast** (standard; at-will)	
Ranged 5; +26 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 8 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).	
⊕ **Blasting Strike** (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃)	
+26 vs. Fortitude; 4d8 damage, and the target is pushed 4 squares.	
⊕ **Cyclone** (standard; recharge when first bloodied)	
+26 vs. Reflex; 4d8 + 8 damage, and the target is restrained (save ends).	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** -
Str 27 (+19)	**Dex** 20 (+16) **Wis** 16 (+14)
Con 24 (+18)	**Int** 16 (+14) **Cha** 10 (+11)

Tactics

The creatures within the library defend it ferociously but do not pursue fleeing characters down or up the stairs.

The ritual-born sentinels converge upon the party from different directions to trap them in an easy-to-deal-with bunch. They use *storm blast* against characters climbing bookcases and *cyclone* to lock down mobile enemies. If one or more enemies break out of their *flaying windstorm* auras, one of the ritual-born sentinels pursues it.

The living dark transport moves toward the nearest opponent using *dimensional slam* as often as possible. When it teleports or shifts an opponent, it moves it toward one of the ritual-born sentinels if possible or toward the exit.



Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light from an indeterminable source fills the chamber.

Whispers of Betrayal: Whispers of betrayal are active in this area (page 49 presents more information on this ubiquitous feature of the citadel).

Side Chambers: The side chambers in this area are described on page 48.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 25 feet high.

Stairs: The shallow steps leading up to the southern alcove are not difficult terrain.

Tiamat Mosaic: This expansive, incredibly lifelike mosaic depicting Tiamat is part of the Tiamat Mosaic trap. See the Tiamat Mosaic trap's stat block for more information.

Bookshelves: The bookshelves are 10 feet high and are securely fastened to the wall. A character can climb a bookshelf with a DC 16 Athletics check. Books on a vast range of subjects cram the shelves.

Characters can topple or move atop a bookshelf. See the sidebar for more information.

Using the Bookshelves in Combat

The characters may use the bookshelves in the room in two ways during battle.

Toppling Them: A character can topple a bookcase by spending a standard action and making a DC 20 Strength check. The falling bookcase attacks any character in its path. The character makes a basic melee attack vs. Reflex; *hit*: target takes 2d6 + 8 damage, is knocked prone and immobilized (save ends); *miss*: target is pushed 2. Characters beneath a bookcase gain superior cover.

A fallen bookcase provides cover and creates difficult terrain (it costs 2 extra squares of movement to enter such a square).

Moving Atop a Bookcase: Characters can move along the top of a bookcase; this counts as difficult terrain. Characters trying to leap from bookcase to bookcase must make a DC 16 Athletics check or fall, taking 2d10 falling damage.

Encounter C6: The Undulating Stair

Encounter Level 23 (25,500 XP)

Setup

1 astral stalker
1 blood fiend
1 undulating walkway trap

When the characters reach this area, the blood fiend and invisible stalker are hiding below the walkways. The invisible stalker has used *invisibility* to hide while the blood fiend simply tries to stay out of sight.

When the PCs enter this area, read:
Unlike the chambers encountered before, this area is a large cavern. You have entered high up in the cavern's western wall. Ahead, several walkways of bone lead to the eastern wall. Below the walkways, a field of sharp rocks covers the floor.

When the blood fiend attacks, read:
Without warning, a massively muscled hairless humanoid bursts from under the bone walkway. As it flies toward you it screeches an incomprehensible war cry.

Astral Stalker **Level 22 Elite Lurker**
Medium elemental humanoid XP 8,300
Initiative +23 **Senses** Perception +18; blindsight 10
HP 314; **Bloodied** 157
AC 38; **Fortitude** 32, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 32
Saving Throws +2
Speed 10, Climb 6
Action Points 1

Claw (Standard, at-will)
+27 vs. Armor Class; 2d6 + 8 damage, and the astral stalker can choose to designate the target as its quarry.

Throat Dart (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Range 5/10; +29 vs. Armor Class; 1d10 + 8 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both). *First Failed Save:* The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends). *Second Failed Save:* The target is stunned instead of immobilized (save ends).

Quick Claws (Standard, at-will)
Against a slowed or an immobilized target, the astral stalker makes two *claw* attacks.

Combat Advantage
The astral stalker's melee attacks deal an extra 2d6 damage against any target it has combat advantage against.

Invisibility (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Illusion**
The astral stalker turns invisible until it attacks.

Stalker's Quarry (Minor, at-will)
The astral stalker knows the exact location of a creature it has designated as its quarry. The astral stalker can have only one quarry at a time, but the power works across any distance and even crosses planar boundaries.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Stealth +24
Str 22 (+17) **Dex** 26 (+19) **Wis** 15 (+13)
Con 19 (+15) **Int** 8 (+10) **Cha** 10 (+11)

Blood Fiend **Level 23 Soldier**
Medium natural beast XP 5,100
Initiative +21 **Senses** Perception +23; darkvision
HP 220; **Bloodied** 110
AC 41; **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 32
Immune fear
Speed 8, Fly 10

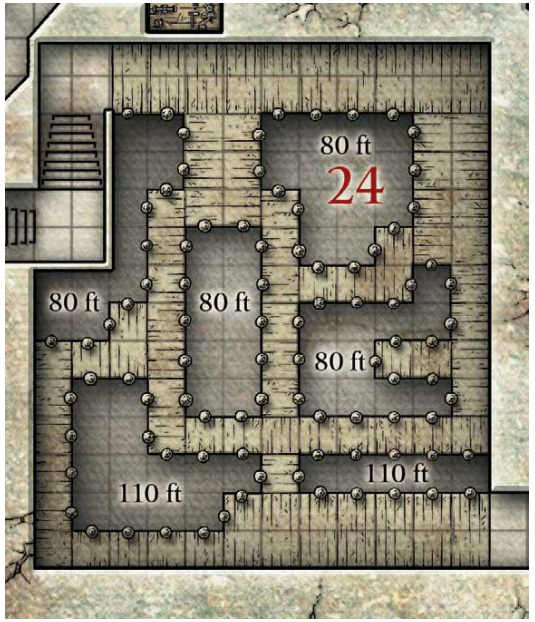
Claws (Standard, at-will)
+28 vs. Armor Class; 2d8 + 10 damage.

Bloodthirsty Bite (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Healing**
Requires combat advantage; +28 vs. Armor Class; 1d8 + 10 damage, and the target is grabbed and takes ongoing 10 damage (until escape). Also, the blood fiend regains 10 hit points.

Terror Gaze (Minor, at-will) ✦ **Fear**
Close blast 3; +24 vs. Will; the target is immobilized (save ends).

Combat Advantage
The blood fiend gains combat advantage against any living, bloodied enemy.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Primordial
Skills Intimidate +24
Str 30 (+21) **Dex** 26 (+19) **Wis** 24 (+18)
Con 28 (+20) **Int** 22 (+17) **Cha** 27 (+19)



Undulating Walkways **Level 24 Elite Obstacle**
Hazard XP 12,100

These walkways are composed entirely of bone magically fused together. Waist high balustrades crafted from thigh bones run along the walkways. Far below, the jagged rocks of the cavern floor wait to greet anyone unfortunate enough to fall from the walkway.

Trap: Crafted as an obstacle to prevent access to Irfelujhar's personal chambers, the walkways are semi-sentient and react to the touch of creatures not uttering the passphrase.

Perception

DC 32: The character notices that the walkways are gently rocking as if someone had just walked across them.

Additional Skill: Religion

DC 28: The character's knowledge provides a +2 bonus to Thievery checks to disable the walkways.

Initiative +8

Trigger

The walkways activate when a creature that does not utter the passphrase reaches the midpoint of the chamber. When this happens, individual bones in the pathway flex and undulate, making movement difficult (it costs 2 extra squares of movement to enter a square containing walkway while the pathway is reacting).

Attack

Standard Action **Melee** 0

Targets: The two characters on the walkway closest to the southeastern exit.

Attack: +29 vs. Reflex.

Hit: The character slides 1 square.

Miss: The character is slowed (save ends).

Countermeasures

A character on the walkway can disable the walkway with a DC 36 Thievery check. The walkway reactivates if a living creature remains or steps on it after 1d4 + 1 rounds.

Turn undead disables the walkway for 1d4 + 1 rounds.

A character can attack a square of walkway (AC 30, other defenses 27, hp 30). If the square is destroyed, any creature on it or an adjacent square falls onto the rocks below (normal save applies).

Tactics

The abominations that dwell here are well aware of the undulating walkway's properties and try to stop opponents from leaving the walkways in any direction except straight down.

They wait to launch their attacks until at least half of the party is on the walkway.

The astral stalker uses invisibility to move about the chamber by scaling the walls, ceiling, or underside of the walkway as necessary to reach targets. Initially, it hangs back from melee, using *throat dart* to hamper an enemy's movement. Once it can easily reach a slowed or immobilized target, it uses *quick claws* to tear it apart.

The blood fiend flies about the chamber, focusing its attacks on isolated targets (particularly those who have fallen from a walkway). It uses *terror gaze* against opponents that are not yet bloodied in an attempt to gain combat advantage. Against bloodied targets, it uses *bloodthirsty bite*.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light from an indeterminable source fills the chamber.

Whispers of Betrayal: Whispers of betrayal are active in this area (page 49 presents more information on this ubiquitous feature of the citadel).

Ceiling: The ceiling is 30 feet above the walkways. Characters can climb across the stalactites and projections on the ceiling with a DC 29 Athletics checks.

Cavern Walls: Characters can climb the cavern walls with a DC 24 Athletics check.

Walkways: These walkways are crafted from long, magically-hardened bones from an unknowable source. They sway alarmingly when walked upon and form part of the undulating walkway trap.

While the undulating walkway trap is inactive, treat walkway squares as difficult terrain. After the trap activates, the walkway is still difficult terrain and it costs 2 extra squares of movement (instead of 1 extra) to enter a walkway square.

The undulating walkway stat block presents more information on this feature.

Balustrades: The walkways have 3-feet-high balustrades that provide cover. Some of these bones still have wisps of oozing flesh attached.

Sharp Rocks: Jagged rocks cover the cavern floor 80 feet below the bone walkway. The cavern floor slopes away another 30 feet to the south, making a fall in that area more dangerous. Characters falling from the walkway take either 8d10 or 11d10 damage, depending on where they fall. Characters under a walkway have cover from attacks originating from the walkway.

Encounter C7: Minions of the Mistress

Encounter Level 24 (30,250 XP)

Setup

1 death knight (D)
8 abyssal ghoul myrmidons (G)
1 half-elf baleful thaumaturge (T)

A few of Tiamat's loyal worshippers linger in the citadel. They remain to safeguard Irfelujhar in case the ritual he created fails. The death knight and his companion have brought a small group of ghouls to bolster their defenses.

When the heroes reach this area, the half-elf thaumaturge is keeping watch through the view port in his door. As soon as he sees or hears intruders (24 passive Perception) he shouts a warning and prepares for battle.

When the characters enter this area, read:
The doors open to reveal a small, bare chamber. To the north are two short corridors, their walls studded with doors. In the northeast corner stands another pair of double doors.

Death Knight (D) **Level 17 Elite Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, human (undead) XP 3,200

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +8; darkvision
Marshal Undead aura 10; lower-level undead allies in the aura gain a +2 bonus to their attack rolls.
HP 264; **Bloodied** 132
AC 35; **Fortitude** 32, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 27
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 5
Action Points 1

Soulsword (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
+23 vs. Armor Class; 1d8 + 12 damage, plus 5 necrotic damage (plus an extra 2d6 necrotic damage on a critical hit).

Containing Strike (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
Requires soulsword; +23 vs. Armor Class; 1d8 + 12 plus 5 necrotic damage, and the death knight can make a melee basic attack as an immediate reaction against the target if the target shifts on its next turn.

Warrior's Challenge (Standard, encounter) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
Requires soulsword; +23 vs. Armor Class; 3d8 + 12 damage, plus 5 necrotic damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares. All enemies within 2 squares of the target are marked until the end of the death knight's next turn.

Unholy Flames (Standard, recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
Close burst 2; +19 vs. Reflex; 6d8 + 12 fire and necrotic damage to living creatures. Undead creatures within the burst (including the death knight) deal an extra 2d6 fire damage with melee attacks until the end of the death knight's next turn.

Combat Challenge
Every time the death knight attacks an enemy, whether that attack hits or misses, the death knight can mark that target. The mark lasts until the end of the death knight's next turn. In addition, whenever an adjacent enemy shifts, the death knight makes a melee basic attack against that enemy (as an immediate interrupt).

Second Wind (Standard; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
The death knight spends a healing surge and regains 57 hit points. The death knight gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the start of its next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Str 20 (+13) **Dex** 12 (+9) **Wis** 11 (+8)
Con 18 (+12) **Int** 13 (+9) **Cha** 14 (+10)
Equipment: soulsword (longsword), light shield, plate armor.

Half-Elf Baleful Thaumaturge (T) **Level 24 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, half-elf XP 6,050

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +14; low-light vision
HP 169; **Bloodied** 84
AC 36; **Fortitude** 32, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 38
Speed 6

Infernal Slam (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
+29 vs. Will; 2d6 + 10 damage, and the half-elf baleful thaumaturge slides the target 3 squares and then teleports 3 squares.

Soul Bite (Standard, at-will) ✦ **Implement**
Ranged 10; +29 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 10 damage, and the half-elf baleful thaumaturge gains 10 temporary hit points.

Mouths of Hell (Standard, encounter) ✦ **Implement, Psychic, Zone**
Close blast 5; +27 vs. Will; 3d12 + 9 psychic damage, and the half-elf baleful thaumaturge gains 10 temporary hit points. Effect: The blast creates a zone filled with ghostly maws that lasts until the end of the encounter. Each creature that starts its turn within the zone takes 15 psychic damage. The thaumaturge gains 5 temporary hit points whenever the zone damages a creature.

Wall of Shadow Teeth (Standard, recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Conjuration, Implement, Necrotic**
Area wall 8 within 10; the half-elf baleful thaumaturge conjures a wall of shadow teeth that lasts until the end of the thaumaturge's next turn. The wall is 2 squares high and attacks each creature that starts its turn within the wall or adjacent to it; +27 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 9 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). Sustain Minor: The wall persists.

Bloody Step (minor; usable only when the half-elf baleful thaumaturge has 5 or more temporary hit points; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
The thaumaturge loses 5 temporary hit points and teleports 8 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +24, Bluff +27, Streetwise +27
Str 14 (+14) **Dex** 16 (+15) **Wis** 15 (+14)
Con 19 (+16) **Int** 25 (+19) **Cha** 30 (+22)
Equipment: implement, wand.

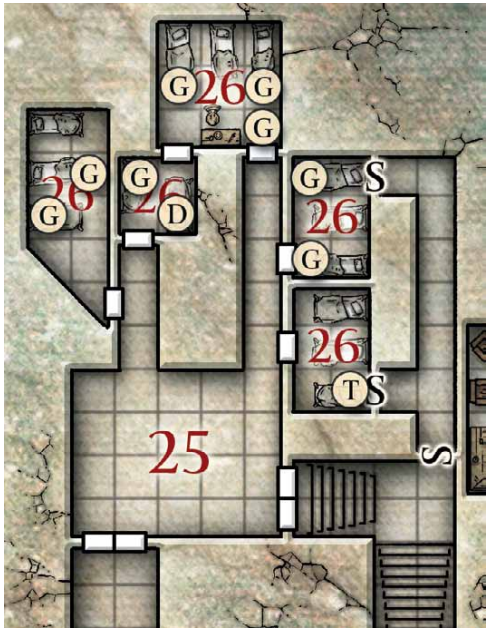
8 Abyssal Ghoul Myrmidons (G)	Level 21 Minion
Medium elemental humanoid (undead)	XP 800 each
Initiative +17	**Senses** Perception +14; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 35; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 31	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic	
Speed 8, climb 4	
⊕ **Claws** (Standard, at-will)	
+26 vs. Armor Class; 9 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).	
✧ **Dead Blood** (when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Necrotic**	
Close burst 1; all enemies in the burst take 5 necrotic damage.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Abyssal
Skills Stealth +22	
Str 27 (+18)	**Dex** 25 (+17) **Wis** 18 (+14)
Con 23 (+16)	**Int** 19 (+14) **Cha** 13 (+11)

Tactics

The death knight strides forth fearlessly to deal with the intruders. It does not maneuver to provide its undead allies with the benefits of its *marshal undead* aura, expecting them to make the effort instead. It uses *valiant strike* when it has adjacent allies and *divine challenge* against any obvious paladins or martial types. It waits until the ghoul myrmidons have entered combat to use *unholy flames*. It saves *terrifying smite* until it can be used to push away an opponent who is protecting an injured ally.

The abyssal ghouls charge into combat, trying to get close to the death knight. A few use the secret passages to try and outflank intruders. They do not shut the secret doors after they use them.

The half-elf baleful thaumaturge stays back from battle, using his ranged powers against intruders. He uses *infernal slam* to stay away from enemies and *soul bite* to gain temporary hit points. He uses *mouths of hell* to damage intruders trying to get down the passageway and *wall of shadow teeth* to inhibit heroes trying to get round his undead allies. If badly damaged, he uses *bloody step* to teleport behind the nearest group of allies.



Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light, from an indeterminable source, fills the chamber.

Whispers of Betrayal: Whispers of betrayal are active in this area (page 49 presents more information on this ubiquitous feature of the citadel).

Ceiling: The ceiling is 15 feet high.

Side Chambers: The side chambers in this area are described on page 49.

Secret Doors: Three secret doors pierce the walls of this area. Each is activated by a slightly raised stone set into the floor on either side of the door. A DC 29 Perception check locates the secret door and its opening mechanism.

Stairs: These steep stairs count as difficult terrain.

Doors: All the doors are closed but not locked. Single doors with a line of sight to the main chamber have small shuttered view ports (all of which are open). Characters looking through a view port have superior cover.

Development

Once the heroes have defeated these creatures, nothing remains to stop them from challenging Irfelujhar in his lair. By now, the lich is almost certainly aware of their presence and prepared for their arrival. Refer to **Encounter C8** for details of his preparations.

Encounter C8: Lair of the Perfidious One

Encounter Level 26 (45,000 XP)

Setup

Irfelujhar (I)

Irfelujhar's personal chambers fill the entire top level of the citadel. Irfelujhar is ever-ready for trouble and almost certainly heard the battle between the characters and his guardians in **Encounter C7,** unless the PCs suppressed the sounds of battle.

When the PCs enter this area, read:

A crystal ceiling allows dim light to illuminate this plushly arranged chamber. Eight crystalline pillars hold the domed ceiling aloft. A large statue of Tiamat stands toward the back of the room. Behind it, five alcoves pierce the wall.

A tall, gaunt, bald human clad in red robes trimmed with black edging stands before the pillar, an elongated ebon wand in hand. His sallow skin has fallen away in places, revealing gleaming white bones beneath.

Tactics

Brought to bay in his own personal chambers, Irfelujhar unleashes his awesome might to destroy the impertinent intruders. During the battle, he taunts the interlopers by telling them that they are too late, that the ritual has already been delivered and should be completed any moment now.

Irfelujhar does not flee—he has lived for centuries, survived many "deaths," and believes he can overcome any threat.

Irfelujhar (I) **Level 26 Solo Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 45,000

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +21; darkvision
Necromantic Aura (Necrotic) aura 5; any living creature that enters or starts its turn in the aura takes 15 necrotic damage.
HP 960; **Bloodied** 480
Regeneration 10. If Irfelujhar takes radiant damage, his regeneration doesn't function until the end of his next turn.
AC 40; **Fortitude** 41, **Reflex** 40, **Will** 42
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic
Saving Throws +5; Irfelujhar makes saving throws vs. stunned and dazed at the start of his turn, even if those conditions are not normally ended by saves.
Speed 6
Action Points 2

Baleful Strike (minor; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+31 vs. AC; 2d8 + 8 necrotic damage, and Irfelujhar shifts 2 squares.

Tormenting Ray (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 20; +29 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 10 necrotic damage, and the target is stunned (save ends).

Cascade of Fire (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire**
Area burst 2 within 20; +29 vs. Reflex; 4d10 + 10 fire damage.

Grasping Tendrils (standard; sustain minor; encounter) ✦ **Force, Zone**
Area burst 2 within 10; +29 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 10 force damage, and the target is restrained (save ends). The burst creates a zone of difficult terrain that lasts until the end of Irfelujhar's next turn. Any enemy that enters the zone is immediately attacked by grasping tendrils. Irfelujhar can sustain the zone as a minor action. *First Failed Save:* the target is stunned (save ends).

Shockwave (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force**
Close burst 3; +29 vs. Reflex; 3d10 + 10 force damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares and falls prone.

Spellmaster (minor, recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Irfelujhar recharges *cascade of fire* or *grasping tendrils*.

Necrotic Master
Irfelujhar can convert any attack power he has to necrotic damage. Change a power's energy keyword to necrotic, or add necrotic energy to an attack power that doesn't normally deal energy damage.

Indestructible
When Irfelujhar is reduced to 0 hit points, his body and possessions crumble into dust. He reappears (along with all his possessions) in 1d10 days within 1 square of his phylactery, unless the phylactery is also found and destroyed.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Arcana +28, Nature +26, Religion +28
Str 20 (+18) **Dex** 22 (+19) **Wis** 26 (+21)
Con 24 (+20) **Int** 30 (+23) **Cha** 20 (+18)
Equipment robes, wand.

He uses *grasping tendrils* and *shockwave* to keep opponents at bay while immolating intruders with *cascade of fire* (which he recharges with *spellmaster*). Irfelujhar moves around the chamber to force the characters to bunch up to get at him. He is a cruel, sadistic individual; he saves his action point until he can use it to slay an injured opponent.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light, filtering in through the crystal ceiling.

Whispers of Betrayal: Whispers of betrayal are active in this area (page 49 presents more information on this ubiquitous feature of the citadel).

Side Chambers: The side chambers are described on page 49.

Ceiling: The domed ceiling, which is crafted from magically hardened crystal, reaches a height of 40

feet in the center of the chamber. Light filters through the crystal from outside.

Pillars: Eight magically hardened crystal pillars hold the ceiling aloft. The pillars block line of effect but not line of sight. They are very smooth but can be scaled with a DC 29 Athletics check.

Tiamat Statue: This huge statue of Tiamat dominates the chamber. Characters can scale the statue with a DC 15 Athletics check. The statue provides cover. Irfelujhar gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls while he is within four squares of the statue.

Dragon Alcoves: Each of the alcoves is keyed to a specific type of chromatic dragon and has a minor effect that affects a creature within the alcove.

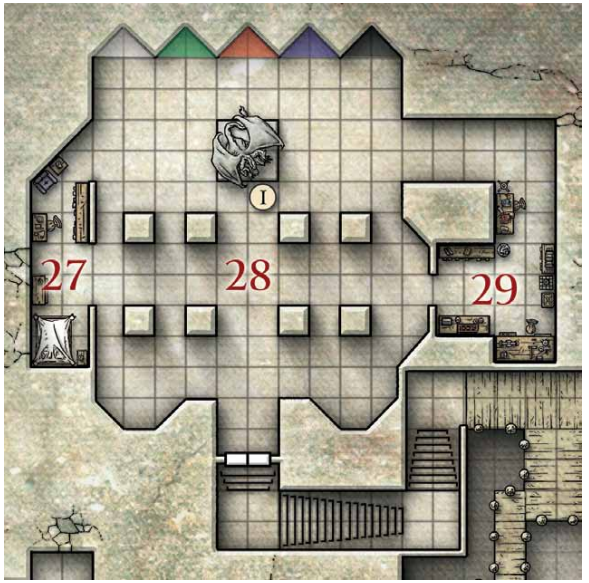
White Alcove: Wisps of cold mist dribble from the carven white dragon's mouth. The air in this alcove is very cold. Characters in this alcove can spend a minor action to command the wisps of smoke to coalesce into a thick, spongy cloud. This cloud reduces by half any fire damage inflicted on a character within it.

Green Alcove: The rearing head of a green dragon emerges from this alcove. Acid drips from the dragon's fangs; it disappears before striking the floor. Characters in this alcove gain a +1 bonus to throw off any effects that can be ended with a saving throw.

Red Alcove: The wide-mouthed head of a red dragon decorates this alcove. This alcove is very warm. A successful attack made from this alcove deals an additional 2d6 fire damage.

Blue Alcove: The rearing head of a blue dragon emerges from this alcove. Crackling energy fills the dragon's maw. A successful attack made from this alcove deals an extra 2d6 electricity damage.

Black Alcove: A black dragon covers the alcove's rear wall. Acid trickles from the dragon's maw and oozes down the wall before evaporating. Characters



making an attack while in the alcove turn invisible until the start of their next turn.

Development

Once Irfelujhar has been defeated, the heroes are free to investigate these chambers and the rest of the citadel. Refer to "Conclusion" for more information.

About the Author

Creighton lives in Torquay, England where, apparently, the palm trees are plastic and the weather is warm. He shares a ramshackle old mansion with his two children ("Genghis" and "Khan") and his very patient wife. He is famed locally for his unending love affair with booze and pizza. As an enduring Greyhawk fan, he has (miraculously) survived the terrors of Baltron's Beacon, unraveled the mysteries besetting the town of Saltmarsh, and slain the lizard king Sakatha. Tragically, many of his companions were less fortunate. His freelance credits include work with Wizards of the Coast, Paizo, and Expeditious Retreat Press. You can check out his blog at http://raging-swan.livejournal.com.

Deities & Demigods: The Raven Queen's Misbegotten

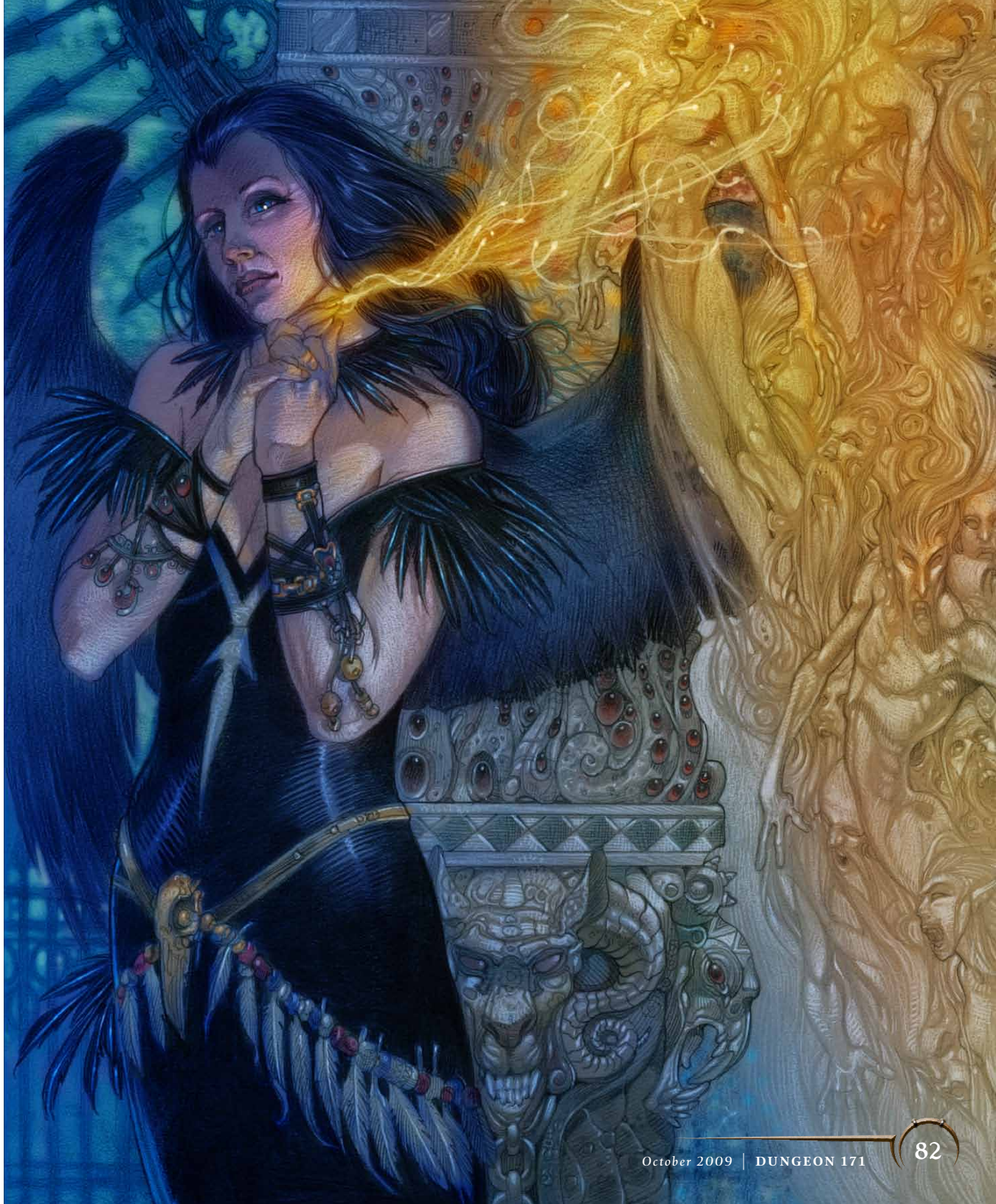
By Robert J. Schwalb

illustrations by Mark A. Nelson

All things end. All things die. So the world turns as it always has and always will. Death is the single truth on which all mortals can agree, because none can escape this particular doom. Death is the great leveler. In the final moments, farmer and king are the same, subject to that final moment, including the rue and panic it creates. Both kobold and dragon must face the realization that all that has been will be no longer, and the great secret of what is to come will be known soon in the great and final revelation.

Death has no name, yet it looms everywhere. One can hear it in a mother's wail and in the rattling breath slipping out between spittle-flecked lips. One can spy it in a predator's eyes or in the glassy-eyed stare of the freshly slain. Its heralds screech as they wheel over ripe fields, grown fat from war's excesses. All who have lost a son, daughter, spouse, or parent know death—and they know it best as the Raven Queen.

Compared to the other gods in the pantheon, the Raven Queen is young. Her relative youth in no way reduces her influence in the mortal world or diminishes her importance to the larger cosmology. As death's queen, the Raven Queen is feared by mortals because through her domain, loosed souls travel to find the fate awaiting them. In her guise as the lady of fates, mortals offer her prayers and sacrifices to alter their fortunes, to make the impossible possible, and to escape a turn of bad luck. And as mistress of



winter, she is the killing frost, the biting wind, and the feathery snowflake's gentle touch. She is the lady of endings, and her presence blankets the world in white, preserving it until that time when all creatures are reborn.

The Raven Queen looms large in folklore, and most mortals have heard tales concerning her rise to power, her victory over the god of the dead, and her subsequent flight to the underworld, that gloomy realm called the Shadowfell. The particulars in each tale vary, but the important elements never change. Their telling and retelling cement the deity's place in the imaginations and fears of those who dwell beneath her cold scrutiny. The Raven Queen elicits loathing and love, occupying a contradictory place, but a coherent one all the same when viewed through a mythological lens.

Life from Death

Tales about the Raven Queen's origin are common knowledge for most, even if the common folk can't name the Lord of the Dead who preceded her. As the stories go, the Raven Queen was a mortal queen, a warrior, or a figure of great power, but her great strength and achievements couldn't shield her from the deadly plagues Nerull, then the god of death and the dead, unleashed to harvest more souls to feed his unnatural hunger. He, like others since, sought to become king over all gods. He believed the path to his conquest would be paved with the souls taken from the dead.

The mortal woman, however, gave him pause. In her he saw fabulous strength, character, and ambition to match his own. He made her his queen, called her Nera, and placed her at his side. But she would kneel to no one, not even a god, and once she learned to harness the souls and use their power, she led the uprising that culminated in her captor's destruction.

What makes this particular myth interesting is that the Raven Queen, although struck down by an insidious plague, proved her superior wit and resolve by overcoming the ennui plaguing her and retaining enough of her drive to oust a god and seize his mantle. Other than Vecna, she is the only known deity who attained divinity after her mortal death.

Divine Interference

By rights, the Raven Queen should have assumed Nerull's place, continuing as he had by binding souls to Pluton, which could then be used and discarded as she willed. The Lord of the Dead's terrible reign convinced the other deities that no god or power should claim the dead, however. The gods allowed the Raven Queen to join their ranks, but with the provision that she would become the god of death and not the god of the dead like her predecessor. In this role, the Raven

Queen would safeguard a soul's passage from the natural world to whatever lay beyond.

"Nera" believed the gods' interference was unjustified, but the way she had exploited the souls against Nerull, proved she was not above using souls for whatever purpose she desired. The gods acted to safeguard mortals from annihilation. Their good intentions created a rift between them and the new god, and those tensions persist even now.

Naked Ambition

From the moment the gods stepped in and blocked her from claiming Nerull's full mantle, the new deity turned her every resource to unshackling herself from their prohibition, going so far as to assume her current identity. She purged the world of her true name and took to calling herself the Raven Queen, all to circumvent the restrictions they placed on her. She quit the Astral Sea, abandoning Pluton to raise a new palace in the Shadowfell where she could unlock the souls' secrets without interference from the meddling powers.

The Raven Queen stood apart from her peers, taking no hand in their dramas unless she could grow her power as a result. For example, she came to Corellon's side during the war against Lolth, lending her sorrowsworn against the fallen elves and their demonic allies. In her defeat, Lolth forfeited her claim to the domain of fate, leaving it available for the Raven Queen to assume as reward for her assistance. Again, when Khala, then god of winter, sought to grow her own power, the Raven Queen was there, fighting alongside the other gods to stake her claim to winter when Khala was eventually cast down. One can be certain if another divine struggle erupted in the planes, the Raven Queen would pick over the gods' corpses and seize their mantles as she has before.

The Raven Queen in the World

All mortals know and fear the Raven Queen. The underlying dread might stem from ancient, perhaps forgotten, knowledge of those ancient days when Nerull the Reaper claimed the dead for himself, or it could be from her cold, uncaring nature as death's manifestation. Her somber priests do little to soften the Raven Queen's presence in the world, and they do much to reinforce her shadowy, often sinister reputation. Fear pervades the ranks of her followers, but so too does respect. She might be detached and distant, but she is not an evil figure. Few people worship her exclusively, but all include her in their prayers and petitions when her influence is desired.

The Raven Queen is far more than a death god: She is the Mistress of Winter and Lady of Fate. Her evolution from a powerful soul to her present state has only grown her influence in the world. The three concerns—death, fate, and winter—are related, but the latter two are not just reflections of her role as death's guardian, but reflect a growing influence over mortal matters.

Servants of the Raven Queen

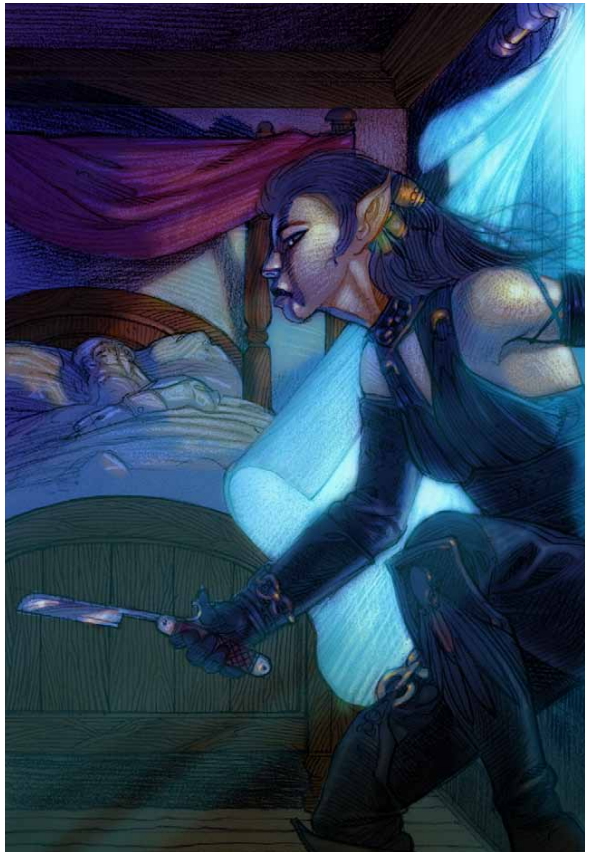
Dedicating one's life to the Raven Queen appeals to few. Doing so consigns the soul to the Raven Queen, which she can use after death in whatever way she wishes. Whether she causes the soul's utter destruction to serve a dark purpose or brings about the soul's transformation into one of her sinister "angels" is up to the Raven Queen entirely. Her champions understand the sacrifice they make and pledge their lives to earning a place at the Raven Queen's side in death to escape the oblivion otherwise awaiting them.

In any event, the Raven Queen's priests attend the dead, preparing corpses in the manner preferred by the dominant culture. Handling the dead is considered an unclean profession in many societies, so the priest's role as undertaker only worsens public perceptions. Many acolytes find themselves ostracized as they make their daily rounds collecting cadavers, scraping up deceased animals, and attending to anyone and anything that died in the night. For all the disdain they receive, the Raven Queen's priests fill a necessary role in a community, and though people might regard them with disgust, no community would drive them out lest they invite the deity's wrath.

Black Wings: The black wings speed the dying to death. They infiltrate communities, skulking through the midnight hours to slip into homes unnoticed. They inspect each resident, and, if they discern anyone near death's door, they whisper a prayer and one of them draws a razor knife across the victim's throat. Each black wing has a tattoo on his or her back in the shape of dark-hued angelic wings.

Bone Picker: The bone pickers are furtive folk who are recruited to collect the dead. When not serving the temple, many work as thieves.

Ebony Guard: A militant warrior dedicated to the Raven Queen, each ebony guard was chosen by a high priest, who looks for a cunning and ferocious follower among the current body of worshipers. An ebony guard cuts his or her own tongue out to make it



impossible to share verbally what each has witnessed in secret rites to the Raven Queen.

Grim Censer-Bearer: Death's malodorous emanations are noxious to the Raven Queen's servants, thus every procession includes a censer-bearer. These hulking priests swing heavy iron censers from which intoxicating blue smoke issues, fed by burning soporific herbs and other mysterious alchemical ingredients. The cloud's inebriating effect is useful in quieting mourners when grief interferes with proper decorum.

Priest of the Raven Queen: Only the most morbid souls could devote themselves to the Raven Queen's service, and her priests are among the most melancholic in the world. Each priest is pale, with drawn features, an emaciated figure, and brittle hair, all evidence of extreme devotion to the deity and each priest's self-denial when it comes to sleep, food, and hygiene.

Unkindness of Ravens: The Raven Queen's temples, shrines, and graveyards attract her creatures.

Black Wing	**Level 5 Lurker**
Medium fey humanoid, elf	XP 200
Initiative +10	**Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision
HP 48; **Bloodied** 24	
AC 19; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 16	
Speed 7; see also *wild step*	
(standard; at-will) ✦ **Razor** **Weapon**	
+10 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage, and if the target moves more than 2 squares on its turn, it takes 1d6 extra damage.	
(standard; at-will) ✦ **Shadow Razor** **Weapon**	
Targets a creature that cannot see the black wing; +10 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target is dazed and takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends both).	
(minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **On Death's Wings** **Weapon**	
Targets one dying creature; no attack roll; the target makes a death saving throw; on a failed saving throw, the black wing gains an action point.	
Elven Accuracy (free; encounter)	
The black wing can reroll an attack roll. It must use the second roll, even if it's lower.	
Raven's Mantle (standard; at-will)	
The black wing becomes invisible until it attacks and shifts 1 square.	
Wild Step	
The black wing ignores difficult terrain when it shifts.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Stealth +11	
Str 13 (+3)	**Dex** 19 (+6) **Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 12 (+3)	**Int** 11 (+2) **Cha** 8 (+1)
Equipment black cloak, 2 razors	

Black Wings in Combat

A black wing fans out, vanishing behind swirling darkness. Once hidden, it creeps up to an opponent to deliver a bleeding wound. Once the foe falls, the black wing hastens its enemy to the death he or she earned.

Bone Picker	**Level 7 Skirmisher**
Small natural humanoid, halfling	XP 300
Initiative +10	**Senses** Perception +11
HP 75; **Bloodied** 37	
AC 21, 23 against opportunity attacks; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 19	
Saving Throws +5 against fear	
Speed 6	
(standard; at-will) ✦ **Short Sword** **Weapon**	
+12 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage.	
(standard; at-will) ✦ **Sling** **Weapon**	
Ranged 10/20; +12 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage.	
(standard; when adjacent to one or more ally; at-will) ✦ **Truss Up** **Weapon**	
+12 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage, and the target is restrained (save ends). *Aftereffect:* The target is slowed (save ends).	
Once Over (free, when the bone picker hits with a melee attack; at-will)	
The creature the bone picker hit grants combat advantage until the end of the bone picker's next turn and the bone picker shifts 1 square.	
Combat Advantage	
The bone picker's melee attacks deal 1d6 extra damage against any creature granting combat advantage to it.	
Second Chance (immediate interrupt, when the bone picker is hit by an attack; encounter)	
The bone picker forces the attacker to reroll the attack and take the new result.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common
Skills Acrobatics +13, Stealth +13, Thievery +13	
Str 9 (+2)	**Dex** 21 (+8) **Wis** 16 (+6)
Con 11 (+3)	**Int** 14 (+5) **Cha** 12 (+4)
Equipment leather armor, short sword, sling with 20 bullets, rope, thieves' tools	

Bone Pickers in Combat

Bone pickers skulk through the cities, searching for corpses to loot and then drag back to the temples. They work in teams to protect themselves. If someone confronts them, they scramble about, working together to *truss up* their opponents and make new corpses from their enemies.

Ebony Guard **Level 12 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 700
Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +9
HP 120; **Bloodied** 60
AC 28; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 24
Speed 5
⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+19 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 damage. *Effect:* The target is marked until the end of the ebony guard's next turn.
Death's Rebuke (free, when an enemy the ebony guard has marked makes an attack that does not include the ebony guard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
The target and each enemy adjacent to the target take 5 necrotic damage.
Executioner's Caress (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
The ebony guard shifts 1 square, then attacks: +19 vs. AC; 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).
Invitation to Death (minor; recharges when the ebony guard reduces an enemy to 0 hit points) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 5; +17 vs. Will; 1d8 + 5 necrotic damage, and the guard pulls the target 5 squares.
Mouth of Madness (immediate reaction, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close blast 3; targets enemies with line of sight to the ebony guard; +15 vs. Will; the target is dazed (save ends).
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Str 21 (+11) **Dex** 11 (+6) **Wis** 16 (+9)
Con 16 (+9) **Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 11 (+6)
Equipment plate armor, greatsword

Ebony Guard in Combat

An ebony guard works with its team to form a line to protect its priests. Each uses its prayers to compel targets to face it, and then it channels its religious furor into its attacks. When it is bloodied, its helmet comes off, revealing its pale features and black, rotting maws.

Grim Censer-Bearer **Level 8 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, goliath XP 350
Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +4
Cloying Smoke (**Poison**) aura 3; any enemy within the aura cannot shift; see also *smashed vessel*
HP 90; **Bloodied** 45
AC 22; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 17
Resist 5 poison
Speed 6
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)
+13 vs. AC; 2d8 + 3 damage, and the grim censer-bearer pushes the target 1 square.
Mountain's Wrath (standard, while bloodied; encounter)
+11 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage.
Smashed Vessel (standard, while bloodied; recharge ⚅ ⚅ ⚅) ✦ **Poison**
Close burst 1; +12 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is dazed and slowed (save ends both). The *cloying smoke* aura drops by 1 square. Once the aura drops to 0, the grim censer-bearer loses the *cloying smoke* aura and cannot recharge *smashed vessel.*
Stone's Endurance (minor; encounter)
The grim censer-bearer gains resist 5 all damage until the end of its next turn.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Skills Athletics +14
Str 21 (+9) **Dex** 16 (+7) **Wis** 11 (+4)
Con 18 (+8) **Int** 9 (+3) **Cha** 8 (+3)
Equipment black robes, censer

Grim Censer-Bearers in Combat

Dim-witted warriors, these lesser priests wade into battle, swinging their iron censers to spread noxious odors wherever they go. As long as the censer-bearer is not bloodied, it uses its fist to knock enemies back. Once it is sufficiently injured, it uses its censer as a weapon, sweeping it around itself until it and its enemies are smashed to bits.

Priest of the Raven Queen **Level 16 Artillery (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 1,400
Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +12
Raven's Blessing aura 3; any ally within the aura gains resist 5 necrotic and a +1 bonus to attack rolls.
HP 120; **Bloodied** 60
AC 28; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 30
Speed 5
⊕ **Sickle** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+13 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target gains vulnerable 5 cold or 5 necrotic until the end of the priest's next turn.
Shadow Well (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
Ranged 10; +21 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 6 necrotic damage, and any enemy adjacent to the target takes 5 cold damage.
Winter's Bitter Grasp (standard; encounter) ✦ **Cold**
Ranged 10; +21 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 6 cold damage, the priest slides the target 3 squares, and the target is immobilized (save ends). *Aftereffect:* The priest slides the target 3 squares and the target is slowed (save ends).
Unkind Intervention (immediate reaction, when an enemy within 5 squares of the priest hits an ally of the priest; recharge 4 5 6) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
The enemy must reroll the attack and use the second result. If the attack misses, the enemy takes 5 cold and necrotic damage.
Furious Dismissal (immediate interrupt, when an enemy enters an adjacent square; encounter) ✦ **Teleport**
Targets the triggering creature; no attack roll; the target teleports 5 squares and the priest or an ally makes a basic attack against the target.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common
Skills Intimidate +20, Religion +18
Str 10 (+8) **Dex** 15 (+10) **Wis** 18 (+12)
Con 18 (+12) **Int** 20 (+13) **Cha** 25 (+15)
Equipment chainmail, sickle

Priests of the Raven Queen in Combat

Individual priests command various powers, each a different expression of the mortal's faith and the strength of his or her convictions. The sample priest represents a typical priest, driven by fear and given to using allies for protection.

Unkindness of Ravens	**Level 6 Skirmisher**
Large natural beast (swarm)	XP 250
Initiative +9	**Senses** Perception +5; low-light vision
Claws and Beaks aura 1; any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 5 damage.	
HP 65; **Bloodied** 32	
AC 21; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 17	
Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 5 against close and area attacks	
Speed 3, fly 8 (hover)	
⸸ **Unkind Attack** (standard; at-will)	
+9 vs. Reflex; 1d4 + 3 damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the unkindness of ravens' next turn.	
Scattering of Feathers (immediate reaction, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**	
The unkindness of ravens breaks apart into its constituent parts and cannot be attacked until the start of its next turn, at which point it reforms in any space within 5 squares of the space it vacated.	
Blot the Sun	
An unkindness of ravens blocks line of sight. Creatures entirely in its space are blinded.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages**
Str 4 (+0) **Dex** 19 (+7)	**Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 9 (+2) **Int** 3 (-1)	**Cha** 6 (+1)

Unkindness of Ravens in Combat

Most ravens collecting at the Raven Queen's holy sites are ordinary types, but if a trespasser walks her sacred grounds, these birds might collect into murderous swarms to punish the desecrator.

Cults and Sects

A god's desires are plain in their edicts, but mortal interpretation can muddy the clearest waters. The following cults and sects represent deviations from what many player characters might expect. Combining these sample organizations with the above creatures allows you to create interesting and dangerous adversaries for the heroic tier and the paragon tier's lower levels.

Cabal of the Reckoning Star

Goal: Searching the midnight skies for the elusive Reckoning Star, the cabal believes its appearance will presage the world's final days, when all living creatures will die. The cabal works to bring about this event to grant glory to the deity.

Size: Tiny and widespread. Angels of doom within the cabal operate singly, working within established temples to further their society's efforts in predicting the Reckoning.

Alignment: Unaligned.

Philosophy: "This world is illusion—a deception fostered by the gods to deny the deity what is hers by rights. This flesh—this meat—is a prison. Its chains bar our proper passage into her blessed service. Only by removing these bodies can we find our true purpose."

History: The mad prophet, Aeshabal, foresaw the world's doom and recorded his experiences on three vellum scrolls. Others later copied the works and distributed them across the civilized lands. A rare few can find meaning in the confused scrawl and rarer still are those who embrace their message. These individuals formed the cabal.

Leadership: Dylus the Unhinged is the most outspoken representative and gathers a flock to welcome what he believes is the star's imminent arrival.

Structure: Members are left to their own devices and have more or less equal say about the organization's direction.

Activities: The star has yet to appear, which is a source of endless frustration for those who believe Aeshabal saw truly. Most peer at the night sky, watching the heavens for a glimpse, but ambitious and mad members work to complete a ritual that would lure the star to this world. Such a ritual would require horrific sacrifices and bizarre ingredients.

The Stained Page

Goal: Wrest the Raven Queen's power by mastering the dead's secrets.

Stated Goal: Bring glory to the Raven Queen by ensuring the dead receive proper burial rites to speed the soul into the afterlife.

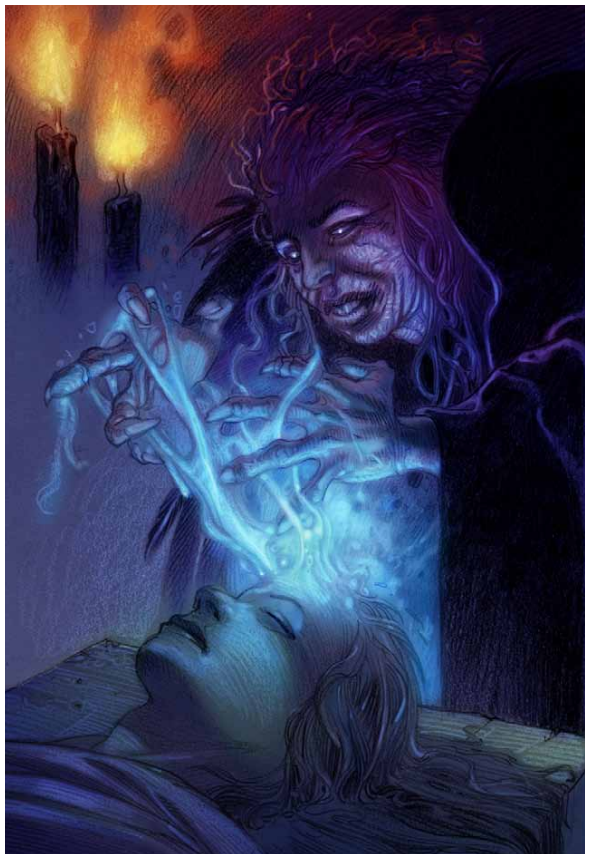
Size: Small and local.

Alignment: Evil.

Dogma: "A soul's migration from flesh is an imperfect exodus because its incorporeal form leaves behind a residue. This material can be harvested and employed much as the Raven Queen did long ago. It is our objective, then, to attain this material in quantities and then to harvest and store it until we have enough to transcend this natural world and become as gods."

History: The Stained Page originated in the battlefield priests who attended the dead during the dark days of Nerath's fall. The dead laid in such quantities that more occult-minded members observed the phenomena first hand and began harvesting the soul residue.

Leadership: Mother Calana was the first priest to discern the substance. She has extended her natural life span through longevity rituals. The Raven Queen



stripped Calana of her divine power, but the priest hides this fact from her followers.

Headquarters: The organization operates out of a large temple and adjoining graveyard in a bustling metropolis. Ready access to fresh cadavers is vital to their experiments.

Structure: Three Keepers, each a priest, advise and support Mother Calana, and they act as the organization's face in the city. Beneath them are temple attendants, embalmers, guards, and acolytes, most with no idea about the organization's true purpose.

Activities: The Stained Page collects cadavers presumably for proper interment in the cemetery on their temple's grounds. Before the body goes into the ground, however, they extract the residual soul substance.

Factions: Phinias, a Keeper, pursues a blasphemy far greater than Calana. Rather than waiting for a mortal to succumb to death, he captures living subjects and uses torture and dark magic to extract the soul intact. No one in the temple knows about his experiments, but his successes have only grown his magical power.

Seekers of the Rotting Skull

Goal: Destroy the usurper and restore death's mantle to its rightful master, Nerull.

Stated Goal: Interfere with no calamity for it is the fate decreed by the Raven Queen. Oppose any efforts to delay or thwart the necessary because such acts are loathsome to her.

Size: Medium and widespread.

Alignment: Chaotic evil.

Dogma: "The Raven Queen's ambition knows no limit and, unless stopped, she will plunge the world into destruction. To this end, we seek Nerull's remains to restore the fallen god to his throne."

History: Many priests dedicated to Nerull survived their god's death. Although many turned to the Raven Queen in his absence, a few lingered, nursing their hate and plotting the Raven Queen's downfall.

Leadership: Ignatious Cree leads the Seekers, guiding his small cult and instructing new recruits in the old rites and ceremonies performed when Nerull still ruled.

Headquarters: Bone Tower is the intellectual and spiritual center for the Seekers. Moldy skulls stare out from the walls, mortared in place by the workers who raised the structure in ancient days.

Structure: The Seekers gather in small cells throughout the major communities in the world. A priest leads each cell and reports, by way of trained raven, to Bone Tower. Each priest commands acolytes who masquerade as the Raven Queen's servants.

Activities: To restore Nerull to life or unlife, the Seekers must first find his carcass. Many Seekers venture into the planes, scouring Pluton for signs of where his body might lay. To fund these expeditions, the Seekers rob graves, murder the rich, and sponsor criminal enterprises.

Enemies: The Seekers regard any genuine servant of the Raven Queen as enemy and those priests who realize what the Seekers are after feel the same way.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is a freelance game designer with numerous design and development credits to his name. You'll find his most recent work in *Draconomicon 2: Metallic Dragons*, *Primal Power*, *Dragon Magazine Annual 2009*, and *Adventurer's Vault 2*. Robert lives in Tennessee.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

"Pure justice? In this world? Ye Gods, but you must be blind. The only justice is that which we make for ourselves."

–Uthias Darkwell
Vigilant Seer of the Eye of Justice
Westgate 1479

The Eye of Justice

By Erik Scott de Bie and Eytan Bernstein
illustrations by Sarah Stoner

The Eye of Justice is a heretical, hypervigilant branch of those faithful to Torm, god of justice. Members of this group brutally root out what they perceive as "evil" in the world around them. Perhaps unsurprisingly in an order composed largely of former criminals, their methods are ruthless and extreme, and they go to any lengths to enforce their own brand of justice.

In current times, the organization is but a shadow of its former glory, and infighting and treachery is normal among its members. In the past, agents guarded every city in Faerûn. Now the group of glorified thugs has its base in Westgate, and fewer than a hundred amoral knights

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retain membership within it. A strictly regimented and corrupt council of five Vigilant Seers rules over these knights with a heavy hand. Still, the knights at least present a veneer of respectability and honor—enough to lure many would-be heroes down the path of evil.

History

The Eye of Justice grew out of a radical faction within the Night Masks of 14th century Westgate, combining the arts of infiltration and spying with the fierce might of the paladin. Its visionary founder—a young thief called Gedrin—led his former Night Mask colleagues to support the cause of good in the fractious city and the Realms in general.

It was their self-appointed duty to protect the world from evil—arbitrarily and without compromise. The Eye has, of course, fallen far from this noble aim, using their original righteousness as an excuse to justify their corrupt agenda.

Although Knights of the Eye speak of glory and honor—and although they boast of protecting the weak from the predations of darkness—their actions resemble those of brutish enforcers: dispensing "justice" as they see fit and seeking to rid Westgate of anyone who stands in their way. Though publicly noble, they compromise justice for vengeance, take bribes, and betray the spirit of their oaths. The Vigilant Seers are interested more in coin and power than in duty or justice.

Religion

The religious nature of the Eye bears some note. They originally followed the cause of the fallen god Helm—whose sword Gedrin claimed to wield—thereafter shifting their allegiance first to Tyr and then to Torm.

Traditionalist members of the organization refer to the "Threefold God" (a heretical "triad" of Helm, Tyr, and Torm), but the modern rank-and-file members of the Eye frown on this term, condemning and punishing those who dare to whisper it. The heresy has become a rallying point for those conservative elements in the order who wish to "redeem" the organization, which has strayed from its original quest. Although the Eye ostensibly follows the cause of Torm, god of law, the order might derive power from another source entirely. If a dark god such as Shar or Bane is pulling the strings of the Eye, most members remain completely unaware of this fact.

Organization and Operations

The Eye of Justice is a small group based in the city of Westgate, where the Vigilant Seers, a council of five powerful knights, oversees it. The council issues edicts to a subset of Watchers (two assigned to each Vigilant Seer), who in turn command the sixty or so others sworn to the Eye. Junior members do not answer to one Seer in particular, but they find one of the Seers is their primary point of contact with the leadership. The Seers compete for the most powerful and most corruptible members. Knights must tread carefully, lest they offend the wrong Seer.

The Seers are—without exception—well connected politically, and each has ties to Westgate's criminal elements, as well. Indeed, they have to have these connections or else they'd quickly lose their seats to rival Seers. As a result of these ties and a Seer's willingness to use them, crossing a Seer is a mistake few make twice.

Their primary rivals (and allies) are the Fire Knives under House Bleth of Westgate, as well as the Zhentarim. Rumors state (correctly) that several powerful members of the Eye are in league with Manshoon—once the Night King, and the nemesis of their founding members—or have become vampires themselves. This supposition is plausible. After all, the council never meets in open daylight but only at night or in their dark, musty hall.

Members

Junior members of the Order come in two varieties. Some are young, enthusiastic knights-in-training who hope to make a difference in the lives of those around them. These ideals are, more often than not, crushed by the increasing brutality and cruelty inherent in the edicts of the Vigilant Seers. Eventually, they are given a choice to either accept the council's wishes or be denounced a heretic and die ignobly. Other knights are grizzled veterans. Numerous among these veterans are those seeking to escape a shady past. The Eye of Justice is filled with former criminals, as it has been since the days of the Night Masks.

Members of the Order serve as hired muscle, thieves, and assassins. This latter task is done in coordination with as against House Bleth. Numerous members of the Eye share the power to shed light from their bodies to drive the shadows away. This ability clearly marks members of the group.

Having the PCs Join

Like their founder—a former Night Mask turned paladin—the knights of the Eye combine the martial prowess of the swordwielder with the stealth and instinct of the hardened thief into an effective, lethal, and ignoble style of retribution.

Classes: The order welcomes avengers and paladins, particularly if they dabble in the arts of thievery and stealth. Clerics and invokers find the order uncomfortable at best. The Seers prefer members with a healthy distance from organized Torm worship, and the rank-and-file resent true divine grace.

As for nondivine classes, rogues find a welcome place in the order, as does the occasional fighter or warlord. The Eye distrusts arcane magic, and few of its members openly use arcane arts. A number of paladins with warlock abilities belong to the order, however.

Many also fear the powers of the Spellplague, and a growing movement within the ranks of the Eye wants to declare all spellscarred folk as foes to be cut down on sight.

Organizational Alignment: Unaligned (originally lawful good)

Membership Benefits: The training for the Eye of Justice is rigorous but rewarding. The Eye of Justice teaches select feats to its members (which will be featured in an upcoming issue of *Dragon*).

The Eye of Justice in Your Campaign

The Eye of Justice—and in particular the corrupt council of Vigilant Seers—makes an excellent source of villains for a campaign, whether the PCs are enemies of the order or have joined the ranks thinking to serve the cause of good whilst unwittingly furthering the cause of evil.

The Light of Order Hides a Dark Heart

A popular misconception holds that the Light of Order is reserved for those members of the organization with the purest heart. In truth, though not all members of the Eye have this ability, all have equal access, regardless of alignment or background. Members who manifest the Light of Order are usually trusted above those who do not. Thus, some of the most corrupt members hide within a veil of light.

Despite this corruption, it should be noted that the Eye of Justice is not entirely dishonest. Forces in the order seek to guide it along the path of righteousness, and several of the newer knights are unaware of the rot at the heart of their order or choose not to see it. The trick to any adventure involving the Eye of Justice is finding out which members are corrupt, and which are innocent pawns.

One such member is the Watcher Levia Shadewalker, a half-elf priestess and stalwart believer in the Eye of Justice—she is also the adopted daughter and protégé of the order's founder, Gedrin. She is alienated from most of the Eye both for her charged mission (purging the organization of corrupt elements) and for her efforts to better the relationship between the temple and her beloved order.

Moreover, the Vigilant Seer Uthias Darkwell, who replaced Gedrin on the council after his disappearance nigh twenty years past, blocks her efforts. He directs her against uncorrupted members who could be her allies.

Play up the moral ambiguity of the order. The leaders of the organization should share a sort of moral hypocrisy, being evil themselves but denying it, using guilt and suspicion as a weapon to root out potential rivals. Perhaps some delude themselves into thinking they are doing Torm's work, while others are fully aware of their cruel nature and feel their moral superiority entitles them to do whatever they will. A true hero would make them cringe.

The decadent, proud, amoral knights among the Watchers and the five Vigilant Seers make excellent foes for bright young members, indirectly working against their interests or sometimes sending junior knights to harm idealists who get in their way. Deception is a finely honed weapon the entrenched antagonists on the council have learned to wield skillfully. Corruption is a charge easily leveled against any junior knight, particularly if he or she uses arcane or spellplague-related powers.

Traditionalist elements of the order—the so-called True Seers—seek to pull the Eye of Justice back to the light by embracing the old ways. They are a minority at present, but their influence is growing. This growth

Modern Inspirations

When building a campaign that uses the Eye of Justice, look to stories of the Spanish Inquisition or corrupt police dramas. Films such as *L.A. Confidential* and *The Departed* provide intrigues for this use with this dastardly organization.

is not least because Vindicator—the magic sword wielded by their founder Gedrin—has appeared once again, this time in the hands of a young man called Shadowbane (see *Sample Hooks*).

For their part, the Vigilant Seers adeptly turn the attention of apologists such as Levia against conservatives such as the True Seers, demonizing the conservative faction as heretical and its actions the product of "blind ambition."

A band of powerful heroes, however, might serve to tip the balance, allowing those members of the Eye who still believe in the fundamental goodness of their organization to rise up against their corrupt masters. Even so, cleansing the order of corruption will prove difficult, since every member's loyalty must be questioned constantly.

How to Involve the PCs

PCs who demonstrate divine or martial prowess and a certain potential for "selective moral blindness" might be approached for membership, thereby becoming embroiled in the Eye's schemes. Alternatively, PCs could come into conflict with the Eye directly, if their goals conflict with those of one or more Vigilant Seers. They might end up as unwitting weapons that members of the council wield against other Seers.

Seer Uthias—the most powerful and corrupt member of the council—might one day decide to rid himself of a lesser member of the Eye who has offended him. He schemes to manipulate the PCs into battle with the offending knight, such as by offering a reward or bounty to deal with the "heretic." If the PCs show mercy, others could enlist the group to aid the apostate member in escaping the wrath of the Vigilant Seers.

Perhaps the PCs uncover evidence (true or false) pointing to a member of the Eye being an evil vampire. The order, however, protects its own. The PCs can come under fire if they choose to act upon their discovery. Members of the Eye are nigh impossible to convince, and they go great lengths to deny the evidence.

Finally, Levia is seeking the man she sees as heir to Gedrin's legacy: her former apprentice Shadowbane, who has fled the corrupt Eye of Justice and the rough city of Westgate. Unable to muster support within the organization, she enlists the aid of the PCs in tracking down the rogue—but Shadowbane does not come quietly. (See *Sample Hooks*.)

Typical Members of the Eye of Justice

From the lowest ranking tough to the knights and Seers, members of the Eye of Justice have a variety of strengths despite the lack of morals some might possess.

Justice Tough

The lowest ranking members of the Eye, the so-called "Justice toughs," are little more than street thugs given the trappings of respectability with uniforms and weak vows. Rigorous combat training gives them excellent teamwork. They are more hired muscle than knights, though they boast of their importance and superiority to the "rabble" that surrounds them.

Justice Tough	**Level 3 Minion Brute**
Medium natural humanoid	XP 38
Initiative +2	**Senses** Perception +1
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 16; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13	
Speed 5	
⊕ **Morningstar** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+7 vs. AC; 5 damage. If another tough is adjacent to the target, the target also falls prone.	
↷ **Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Ranged 5/10; +5 vs. AC; 4 damage.	
Combat Advantage	
The tough's attack deals 1 extra damage to any target granting combat advantage to it.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common
Str 16 (+4)	**Dex** 13 (+2) **Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 15 (+3)	**Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 8 (+0)
Equipment chainmail, light shield, morningstar, 2 daggers	

Justice Tough Tactics

Justice toughs gang up on enemies when possible, assisting fellow members of the Eye to knock foes prone and gain combat advantage. They try to knock foes to the ground, and then beat them into submission. They love to boast and jeer at their foes during combat, and they are fanatically loyal to the cause of the Eye of Justice.

Knight of the Eye

Knights of the Eye are the lowest ranking members of the Eye who hold knighthood. Typically uneducated and coming from the dregs of society—many of them

former criminals—the knights draw steel without hesitation or remorse.

Knight of the Eye	**Level 3 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid	XP 150
Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +1	
HP 47; **Bloodied** 23	
AC 19; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14	
Speed 5	
(standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**: **Longsword**	
+10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the knight's next turn.	
(standard; at-will) • **Weapon**: **Dagger**	
Ranged 5/10; +8 vs. AC; 1d4 + 5 damage.	
(standard; must have combat advantage against target; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**: **Stealthy Smite**	
+10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 9 damage, and the target falls prone.	
Punitive Radiance (free, when the knight hits with a melee attack; encounter)	
The attack deals 1d6 extra radiant damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of the knight's next turn.	
Knight's Shove (immediate interrupt, when a creature marked by the knight shifts; at-will)	
The knight makes a longsword attack against the triggering creature. If it hits, the target falls prone.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common	
Str 16 (+4) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 11 (+1)	
Con 15 (+3) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+2)	
Equipment plate armor, light shield, longsword, 2 daggers	

Knight of the Eye Tactics

Knights of the Eye are deceptively straightforward combatants, and they lure opponents into a false sense of security before flanking and taking them down with ignoble attacks. They favor teamwork that allows them to strike from all sides.

Justice Stalker

Justice stalkers are the scouts, spies, and killers of the Eye of Justice. Most are fully aware of the ignoble brutality of the Eye and couldn't care less. If the PCs are clearly good hearted, the Seers send justice stalkers to deal with them.

Justice Stalker	**Level 5 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid	XP 200
Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +9	
HP 62; **Bloodied** 31	
AC 19; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 17	
Speed 6	
(standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**: **Short Sword**	
+10 vs. AC; 1d6 + 7 damage, and the stalker shifts 2 squares.	
(standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**: **Crossbow**	
Ranged 15/30; +10 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage.	
(standard; requires combat advantage against the target; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**: **Adept Smite**	
+8 vs. Will, 1d6 + 8 radiant damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).	
Combat Advantage	
The stalker's attack deals 1d6 extra damage to any target granting combat advantage to it.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common	
Str 12 (+3) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 14 (+4)	
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 10 (+2)	
Equipment leather armor, short sword, crossbow, 20 bolts	

Justice Stalker Tactics

Justice stalkers seek combat advantage and like to attack by surprise. If possible, they strike with their crossbows from a distance first, then close to flank enemies and set up hard-hitting attacks with their *adept smite* ability. Natural cowards, they retreat when bloodied, using their crossbows to cover their escape.

Justice Watcher

Justice watchers are the hardened weapons of the Eye of Justice, sent in when a job needs to be performed with overwhelming force. A few are corrupt and amoral, but the majority are so bound up in their arrogance that they can justify any means to achieve the desired "justice" for all. If shown the error of their ways, they might react with violence out of instinct.

Justice Watcher	**Level 10 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid	XP 500
Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +5	
HP 125; **Bloodied** 62	
AC 22; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 22	
Speed 5	
(standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**: **Radiant Sword**	
+13 vs. AC; 2d10 + 6 radiant damage.	
(standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Implement, Radiant**: **Searing Justice**	
Ranged 10; +11 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 6 radiant damage, and the target is dazed until end of the watcher's next turn.	
(standard; encounter) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**: **Brilliant Cut**	
Targets one or two creatures; +11 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 6 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 radiant damage (save ends).	
Pitiless Guardian (immediate reaction, when the watcher or an ally adjacent to the watcher is hit by a melee attack; recharges when the watcher is first bloodied)	
The watcher makes a melee basic attack against the attacker.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common	
Str 21 (+10) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 11 (+5)	
Con 15 (+7) **Int** 10 (+5) **Cha** 18 (+9)	
Equipment scale armor, bastard sword, holy symbol	

Justice Watcher Tactics

Justice Watchers stride forth boldly into combat, wielding great bastard swords that crackle with furious radiance. They use their *brilliant cut* ability as a wicked surprise for overconfident opponents who seek to team up against them. They are not above fleeing when severely wounded.

Uthias Darkwell, Vigilant Seer

Uthias is a powerful, brilliant, and thoroughly corrupt knight skilled at manipulation and lies. His command over the Eye of Justice is largely unchallenged. Hoping

to deal with his potential enemies in one event, he bides his time and finalizes his plans to deal with any thorns in his side (such as Levia). Sometimes, however, the other Seers and their plans interfere with his, causing momentary setbacks.

Uthias Darkwell **Level 12 Elite Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 1400
Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +15
HP 256; **Bloodied** 128
AC 28; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 27
Aura of Resolve aura 2; any ally within Uthias's aura gains a +2 bonus to all defenses.
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1
⊕ **Vigilant Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**
+19 vs. AC; 1d10 + 9 radiant damage, and the target is marked.
Blazing Retribution (standard; encounter) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**
+19 vs. AC; 1d10 + 9 damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 radiant damage (save ends). Until the end of the encounter, on a turn the target takes radiant damage, the target is immobilized until the end of its next turn.
Sweeping Strike (standard; at-will)
Uthias makes a basic attack against two targets adjacent to him.
Harsh Dictum (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Radiant, Thunder**
Close burst 1; +17 vs. Will; 2d10 + 3 radiant and thunder damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).
Harsh Justiciar (immediate interrupt, when a marked target shifts or makes an attack that does not include Uthias as a target)
Uthias makes a *vigilant sword* attack against the target. If this attack hits, the target falls prone.
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Bluff +18, Insight +20
Str 20 (+11) **Dex** 22 (+12) **Wis** 28 (+15)
Con 24 (+13) **Int** 18 (+10) **Cha** 25(+13)
Equipment plate armor, vigilant blade

Uthias Darkwell Tactics

Uthias prefers to lie and manipulate rather than fight, but he is an unhesitating warrior when it comes to blows. He focuses his attacks on one enemy at a time, preferring holy warriors, whose earnest faith galls him.

Sample Hooks

Fifteen years ago, Gedrin disappeared from the Eye of Justice, taking with him the fabulous sword Vindicator. Some years later, a spellscarred cutpurse of about 15 winters appeared on the steps of the Order's guildhall in Westgate in 1470. This boy, calling himself only "Shadowbane," demanded to be trained in the ways of the Order. Over the next 8 years he became one of the best and deadliest knights in the Order. His heart, however, rebelled against the corruption in the ranks of the Eye, and he struck out alone to crusade against evil and corruption in his own way. His whereabouts are currently unknown. His former teacher, Levia, hopes to bring him back.

The Proud Teacher (Level 6)

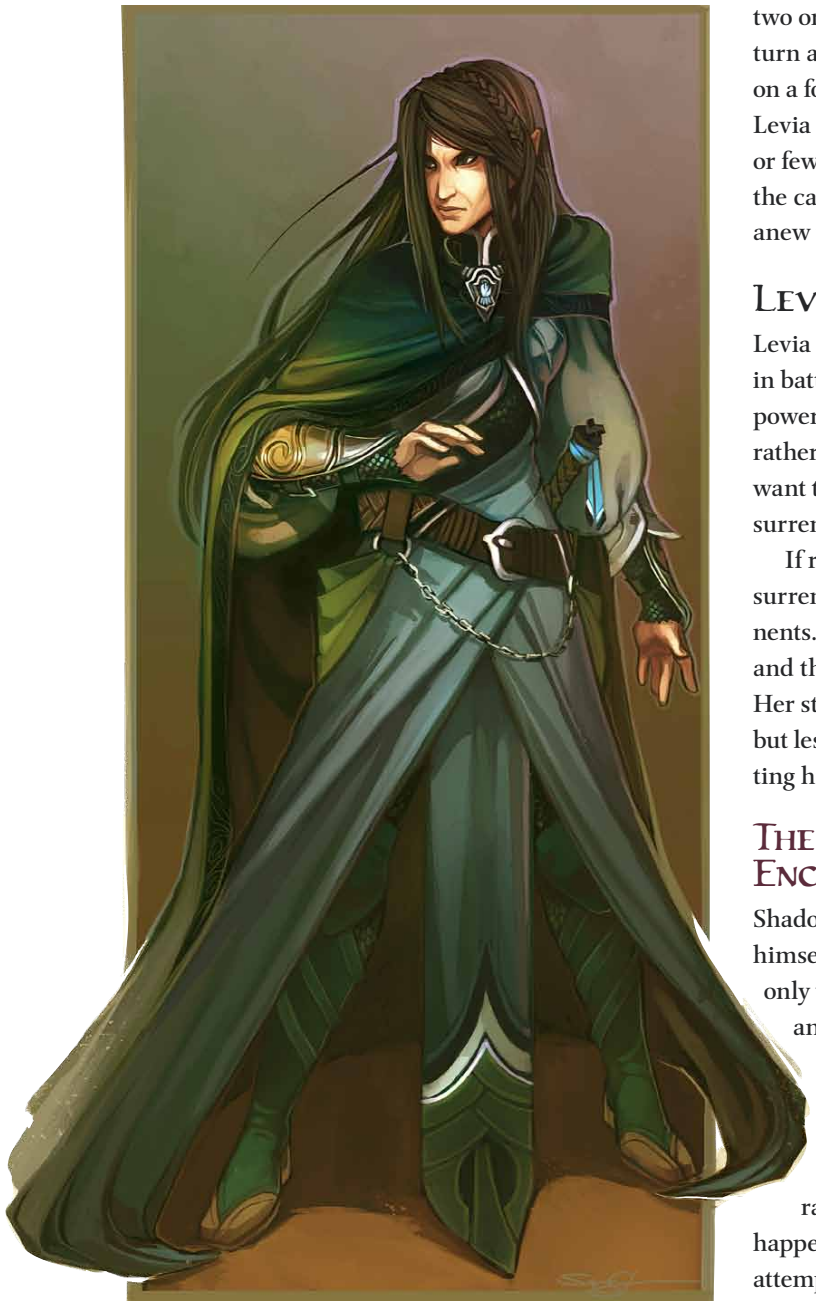
A lovely half-elf stands before you, clad in chainmail emblazoned with an eye in a raised gauntlet. Her jaw is set, but the lines of her face speak of sadness.

Levia Shadewalker—who loves Shadowbane like a brother and perhaps more—wants to hire the PCs to find the vigilante and return him to Westgate. As a high-ranking member of the Eye of Justice, Levia can offer sufficient coin and membership in the Order as a reward. To her, Shadowbane is the ordained leader of the Eye of Justice—the rightful heir to her mentor, Gedrin. Returning him to his rightful place can redeem the Order after years of corruption and foul play.

Levia is a proud female, and if she is insulted—or if Shadowbane is insulted or his honor questioned—it can lead to blows. If attacked, Levia has the statistics presented below and is accompanied by at least two knights of the Eye and one justice stalker.

However, owing to the Order's growing distrust and outright prejudice against the spellscarred (as noted above), Levia's high opinion of the young Shadowbane might not be shared by her fellow knights. If

Levia Shadewalker **Level 6 Elite Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, half-elf XP 500
Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +13
Aura of Retribution aura 2; any creature within the aura that hits Levia or her allies with an attack takes 5 radiant damage.
HP 142; **Bloodied** 71
AC 20; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 20
Saving Throws +2
Speed 5
Action Points 1
⊕ **Heavy Mace** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage plus 1d6 radiant damage.
Bolts of Glory (standard; at-will) • **Divine**
Ranged 10; one or two targets; +10 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 4 radiant damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). A slowed target is instead immobilized (save ends).
Divine Tremor (standard; recharge ⚄, ⚃) ✦ **Divine, Radiant**
Area burst 2 within 10; +10 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 5 radiant damage, and the target falls prone.
Command of Justice (minor 1/round; at-will)
One ally within line of sight of Levia and who can hear Levia makes a basic attack as a free action.
Lay on Hands (standard; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
Levia or one ally adjacent to her regains 20 hit points.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Bluff +11, Insight +13, Stealth +8, Religion +13
Str 16 (+6) **Dex** 11 (+3) **Wis** 20 (+8)
Con 15 (+3) **Int** 15 (+5) **Cha** 16 (+6)
Equipment chainmail, heavy mace, holy symbol, cloak



two or more of her bodyguards are bloodied, all three turn against her as a traitor to the cause—"leading us on a fool's errand to save a scarred freak!"—attacking Levia as a heretic until she has one-quarter hit points or fewer remaining, then abandoning her for dead in the care of the likely confused PCs. Levia begs them anew to aid in her search.

Levia Tactics

Levia fights as a combat leader, directing her people in battle and bolstering their efforts with her own powers. She is a capable warrior, but prefers to parlay rather than fight to the death. Neither does she want to hurt potential allies, so she readily accepts surrender.

If reduced to one-quarter hit points or fewer, Levia surrenders and attempts to reason with her opponents. This action is seen by her men as treachery, and they might turn on her at the DM's discretion. Her standing in the Eye of Justice is important to her, but less important than finding Shadowbane and putting him back on the path to his destiny.

The Vigilante (Tactical Encounter Level 8)

Shadowbane is a mysterious figure, who kept to himself during his years in Westgate, spending time only with Levia, his teacher, and his closest friend and best support, a halfling healer named Celica (a fellow orphan who came with him from Luskan).

Allegedly, he was a beggar and con artist in Luskan—capable of what he called "cruel rages and darker deeds"—until he met Gedrin by happenstance and had a change of heart. At first, he attempted to flee his destiny, but in time he embraced it, regained the lost Vindicator, and traveled to Westgate to train with Gedrin's apprentice and adopted daughter, Levia.

After Shadowbane had a falling out with the ruling council of the Eye of Justice, he left Westgate in favor of Waterdeep, the City of Splendors, where he haunts the streets, meting out justice as he sees fit (particularly among merchants who ply illicit trade in Downshadow and on the streets above). He is fighting a one-man campaign against evil and allows no one to stand in his way.

Currently, Shadowbane is patrolling a construction site that spans a number of buildings in Waterdeep's upscale North Ward. The buildings adjoin the expanding complex of House Roaringhorn, a noble family of Waterdeep that he believes is secretly trading in poisons and illicit drugs (one or more members might be guilty, or perhaps someone is framing them). They have recently bought up the businesses west of their villa Horngates (built on the site of the Spellplague-collapsed High House of Roaringhorn [N42 on 2nd Edition Waterdeep maps; N42 on page 101 of 3.5 Edition *City of Splendors: Waterdeep*]) and are refurbishing them for purposes better left to unwashed merchants and folk who have to work for a living—perfect for illicit trade.

Shadowbane hopes to root out the dealers and right the injustice, but a wizard of House Roaringhorn—the real culprit—is wise to his activities.

How to Involve the PCs

Perhaps the PCs are fulfilling Levia's plea to find Shadowbane and convince him to return to Westgate to return the Eye of Justice. Alternatively, perhaps the Roaringhorn wizard—Ralvaster "Blaster" Hendrick—has hired the PCs to confront Shadowbane on behalf

of his employers. He is, in reality, stealing from his employers and wants to hire adventurers to cover his own involvement.

This encounter can be easy if the PCs ally with Shadowbane against Ralvaster and his hirelings, or hard for the PCs if they have to fight Shadowbane and the thugs at once. If events turn against them, give them a chance to use Diplomacy (DC 18) to convince Shadowbane to aid, rather than fight them. Alternatively, have one or two of the street thugs flee once bloodied.

Setup

Shadowbane: Shadowbane is waiting for a drug deal to go down within the confines of the construction site. The second group of dealers are coming from a nearby entrance to Downshadow—a hotbed of illicit trade. Shadowbane is currently standing on the eastern edge of the northeast building in the plaza west of the Horngates villa, watching his quarry (Ralvaster and his group) silently. He is passively hiding (Perception DC 21 to detect).

Although not evil, Shadowbane does not take kindly to attempts to stop him or disrupt his quest for justice. His vigilantism is illegal in the city of Waterdeep, and he knows that to be caught by the Watch means prison. He is resolute in the execution of his duties and takes down any opposition brutally and efficiently.

When the PCs see Shadowbane, read the following (if he has not detected them, revise accordingly):

A man stands before you, sheathed in a tattered gray cloak and a full black helm that hides his face. His sword gleams with a holy white flame, and when he extends a finger toward you, it as though divine judgment has fallen upon you from the heavens.

The Drug Dealers: The four street thugs (led by Ralvaster) are guarding a shipment of drugs and poisons, waiting for their underworld contacts. If they detect the PCs (DC 18 Stealth check), then they attack right away.

If the PCs approach Ralvaster first, Shadowbane can act as an ally or an enemy in this fight. Initially, he interprets the heroes as the drug dealers themselves, come to kill Ralvaster and take the goods. He intercedes when he feels he has the advantage (at the DM's discretion) and attacks either side as the situation warrants. If attacked himself, he responds with brutal violence.

When the PCs come near the thugs, read the following:

A rag-tag collection of thugs is retrieving a collection of wax-sealed cases from a hiding place in the small maintenance lean-to at the edge of the building. A gaunt man in robes watches over them impatiently.

"Quickly, quickly," he says, "haven't got all night . . ."

Features of the Area

The construction site can be treacherous in areas.

Buildings: All buildings are 20 feet tall (2d10 damage from falling).

Ladder Bridge: Crossing a ladder bridge requires a DC 10 Acrobatics check. Failure by 5 or more causes a creature to fall 20 feet to the ground below.

Chimneys: Chimneys provide cover to a creature hiding behind one (or total cover if the creature is prone). A creature cannot stand on a chimney.

Ladders: Climbing a ladder is a DC 10 Athletics check in the dark.

Rubble: Areas of rubble are difficult terrain. A creature that takes damage while standing in rubble falls prone.

Fountain: A large fountain sits as part of the plaza of the North Ward. The water in the fountain is considered difficult terrain. The center of the fountain is a statue of Piergeiron Paladinson. The statue provides cover.

Streets: The area is bounded by four streets: Tassar's Street to the north, Whaelgond Way to the west, Ussilbran to the east, and Suldown about 300 feet to the south of the fountain.

Waterdeep Street Thug		**Level 7 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, human		XP 300
Initiative +9	**Senses** Perception +5	
HP 82; **Bloodied** 41		
AC 21; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 17		
Speed 6		
⊕ **Morningstar** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
+14 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 damage, and target is marked until the end of the thug's next turn.		
➢ **Poisoned Dagger** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**		
Ranged 5/10; +14 vs. AC; 1d4 + 6 damage, ongoing 5 poison damage, and the target grants combat advantage (save ends both).		
⸸ **Rattling Smash** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear, Weapon**		
+12 vs. Will; 2d10 + 8 damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of its next turn. If the target was marked by the tough, the target is also dazed until the end of the tough's next turn.		
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common	
Str 16 (+6)	**Dex** 18 (+7)	**Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 18 (+7)	**Int** 13 (+4)	**Cha** 15 (+5)
Equipment hide armor, dagger, morningstar		

Ralvaster "Blaster" Hendrick **Level 8 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 700

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +9
HP 184; **Bloodied** 92
AC 21; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 22
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Staff of Striking (standard; at-will) ✦ **Arcane, Weapon**
+13 vs. AC; 1d6 + 8 damage, and target is dazed until end of the target's next turn.

Magic Missile Blast (standard; at-will) ✦ **Arcane, Force**
Ranged 20; one or two targets; +12 vs. Fortitude; 2d4 + 8 force damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.

Blast of Heart's Terror (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Arcane, Charm, Psychic**
Ranged 10; +12 vs. Will; the target is dominated until the end of its next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target is dazed (save ends).

Blasting Defense (immediate reaction, when Ralvaster is hit by a melee attack; encounter) ✦ **Arcane, Force**
Targets triggering attacker; +12 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 6 force damage, and target is pushed 5 squares and stunned (save ends).

Winter's Blast (standard; encounter) ✦ **Arcane, Cold**
Area burst 2 within 10; +12 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 6 cold damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of Ralvaster's next turn. The area becomes difficult terrain for the duration of the encounter.

Expeditious Retreat (move; encounter) ✦ **Arcane**
Ralvaster shifts up to twice his speed.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Str 14 (+6) **Dex** 18 (+8) **Wis** 20 (+9)
Con 20 (+9) **Int** 22 (+10) **Cha** 18 (+8)
Equipment staff

Shadowbane **Level 8 Elite Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 700

Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +10
HP 156; **Bloodied** 78 (see *plague-scarred flesh*)
AC 22; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20
Resist 5 all when bloodied
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Vindicator (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**
+13 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage plus 1d6 radiant damage.

Justice Flame (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Radiant**
Ranged 10; +11 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 5 fire and radiant damage.

Offensive Parry (immediate reaction, when a melee attack misses Shadowbane; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Shadowbane shifts 1 square and makes a Vindicator attack against the triggering attacker. If the attack hits, the target is pushed 2 squares and falls prone.

Vindicator Assault (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**
Shadowbane makes two Vindicator attacks and can shift 2 squares after each hit or miss. If he hits the same target with both attacks, the target takes ongoing 5 radiant damage (save ends), and the target is pushed 2 squares.

Vigilante's Leap (move; recharge ⚀ ⚄ ⚅)
Shadowbane jumps up to 6 squares (up to 4 squares vertically) without provoking opportunity attacks.

Lay on Hands (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Healing**
Shadowbane or one ally to him regains 39 hit points.

Alignment Good **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Athletics +13, Perception +15, Stealth +15, Religion +11
Str 18 (+8) **Dex** 22 (+10) **Wis** 22 (+10)
Con 16 (+7) **Int** 14 (+6) **Cha** 18 (+8)
Equipment +2 leather armor, +2 vigilant blade, dagger, holy symbol of Helm

Tactics

Ralvaster hides behind his hired thugs and blasts from a distance, while they do all they can to keep the attackers from him. The thugs prefer to flank when possible and favor targets hindered by Ralvaster's control abilities.

If the heroes do not discover Shadowbane before or during an attack on Ralvaster and his toughs, Shadowbane waits until three combatants are bloodied before joining the fight. He attacks whichever side has more bloodied combatants, thinking to eliminate that side quickly and deal with the survivors of the other side.

After he joins the fight, Shadowbane tries to keep moving, shifting after his attacks and leaping at his foes. He is aggressive and seems unable to feel the pain of his injuries. When surrounded, he uses his area powers, and then shifts or leaps away. Self-preservation is secondary to his crusade: He does not retreat or back down, though he does listen to reason (see below). If he is reduced to one-quarter hit points, he prefers to flee if he can do so without allowing justice to slip through his fingers.

If Shadowbane is defeated or convinced to aid the PCs, he hesitates before returning to Westgate. (Run a skill challenge complexity 2, DC 18, relevant skills: Bluff, Diplomacy, History, Religion.) He is uncertain whether the Eye of Justice can be redeemed, but he is willing to try. Success means the return of a valuable force to the side of justice in the Realms, and the fulfillment of Shadowbane's destiny—or (possibly) the destiny of a PC paladin or other noble-minded hero. If such a hero defeats Shadowbane, the vigilante might pass on the fabulous sword Vindicator and the great legacy of which it is a part.

About the Author

Erik Scott de Bie lives in the Seattle area with his wife, two cats, and far too much gamer stuff. He writes technical documentation by day, fights injustice by night, and gives the rest of his time to fiction, gaming, and his lovely lady (not necessarily in that order). He is the author of several Forgotten Realms® novels, including *Ghostwalker*, *Depths of Madness*, and his most recent release, *Downshadow*.

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FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Campaign Workbook
Hero Battle: Drizzt

PARAGON
11–20

By Chris Sims and Chris Youngs

illustration by Evan Shipard
cartography by Jason A. Engle

Drizzt Do'Urden

The name strikes fear into the hearts of villains across the Realms, and admiration in those of nobler pursuits. But what might happen if the heroes of your Forgotten Realms® *campaign crossed swords with one of Faerûn's most legendary figures? What could bring about such a conflict? More important, how would the heroes fare?*

Drizzt is always cast as a harbinger of justice and peace, so fighting him in a realistic scenario has never been an option before. But given the right motivation, the dark elf could find your adventurers a serious threat, and seek to end that threat. The following scenario is intended as just such an option. It can be modified in any number of ways, and the article provides several options for doing just that.

Unleash Drizzt on your players' characters, watch the double takes, and enjoy.

What the PCs Know

The heroes are here to find a map to Gauntlgrym, the legendary lost city of the dwarves that is said to hold some of that race's greatest treasures. But they think they're actually working for a powerful force for good, an agent from Mirabar and priestess of Moradin who sought adventurers in Silverymoon to recover the map. That agent's name is Ulsa Ironshield. What the PCs don't know is that Ulsa is actually a raavasta, a shapechanging spy who was summoned and bound into servitude by Prince Rivalen Tanthul. For this encounter, Drizzt, knows the name Ulsa Ironshield, and knows that this individual is an agent of Netheril, not of the dwarves of Mirabar.

Of course, you might decide that the PCs are actually acting on behalf of a drow power. That makes the scenario more interesting, in many ways. Are the PCs the unwitting tools of a powerful drow agent? Or are they knowingly pursuing this quest because some greater good might be achieved by a temporary alliance with a dark power? Either way, this encounter assumes that the PCs are just as misguided as Drizzt, and that they try to convince him of their innocence (see the Convincing Drizzt skill challenge).

What Drizzt Knows

Drizzt thinks that a group of drow, specifically House Mizzrym, seeks a map to fabled Gauntlgrym. He despises the idea that anyone might pillage the dwarven city for ignoble ends, and is doubly furious that self-serving members of his own race could be behind the attempt. The name "Livilia" came up when Drizzt looked into this rumor of tomb robbers seeking the lost map, and he knows this drow as a member of House Mizzrym. The house has a history in dealing with stolen magic items and artifacts, and he has decided that the drow cannot ever possess a map to Gauntlgrym. He has firm confirmation that the PCs are agents acting on behalf of House Mizzrym, however incorrect that information actually is, and he is difficult to dissuade from this view.

Setup

Drizzt (D)
Guenhwyvar (G)

The PCs have come in search of a map to Gauntlgrym, based on information they've received from supposedly reliable source. They've traveled long and far to reach a place near the Spine of the World, where the map is said to have been lost. But as they approach, all is not as it appears.

When the encounter begins, read:

Trees have been bent with snow for the past several miles. The rough path is choked with drifts that require constant effort to push through. To the north, the Spine of the World looms, the mountain chain filling any visual gaps in the trees ahead. Breaking through the tree line, you step into the first true foothills you've seen in your quest for the map of Gauntlgrym. An ancient stone tower, built partly into the hill, perches on a ledge ahead, its walls crumbling and its roof long gone. Part of its southern wall has fallen in, and pale blue light glows from within the ground floor. A deathly calm hovers over the winter-shrouded landscape, as if the world was holding its breath.

Ask the PCs for the passive Perception scores, and compare them to Drizzt's Stealth check.

If the PCs are surprised, read:

Without warning, a figure wrapped in a fur-lined cloak and wearing supple chainmail leaps from behind a cluster of snow-covered rocks on the ledge above, launching himself silently at you. His dark skin and white hair give him away as a drow, but his twin scimitars reveal him as the most famous drow in all Faerûn: Drizzt Do'Urden. His purpose is clear as he begins his attack.

"You will not find what you seek here, and neither will your master. Which of you would like to live and take my message back to Livilia and House Mizzrym?"

Just as the dark elf lands atop the snow, a massive black form hurtles in from the other side—Drizzt's legendary companion, the panther Guenhwyvar. Moving with speed matched only by her master, the cat leaps toward you, fangs bared.

If the PCs spot Drizzt, instead read:

You spot a shadow in the rocks ahead—a figure, wrapped in a dark cloak, blends almost seamlessly with the background. A dark-skinned face, almost completely hidden by a cowl, watches you intently as you approach. But then, noticing your attention, the figure leaps forward. His dark skin and white hair give him away as a drow, but his twin scimitars reveal him as the most famous drow in all Faerûn: Drizzt Do'Urden. His purpose is clear as he begins his attack.

"You will not find what you seek here, and neither will your master. Which Livilia and House Mizzrym?"

Just as the dark elf lands atop the snow, a massive black form hurtles in from the other side—Drizzt's legendary companion, the panther Guenhwyvar. Moving with speed matched only by her master, the cat leaps toward you, fangs bared.

Tactics

Guenhwyvar begins the fight with 200 hp, with 150 granted from Drizzt via the owner fortified power. Lower Drizzt's total hit points by this much.

Drizzt begins combat by designating the nearest foe as his hunter's quarry, then leads with four-fang assault, shifting between the front line PCs while Guenhwyvar attacks, preferably from a flanking position. Drizzt tries to set himself up to use spine of the world avalanche on the second round (and whenever it recharges thereafter), trying to target less-well-armored foes with as many attacks as he can. He shifts his hunter's quarry to such an enemy if he can. Drizzt keeps cloud of darkness in reserve in case he gets into trouble, and uses the area's difficult terrain against the heroes as much as possible using undisturbed stride. The drow retreats to the circle of light periodically if he's able, especially if the PCs have already completed the first half of the skill challenge. Drizzt means to use the circle as a gauge to see if the PCs might be trustworthy. If an enemy drops to 0 hp, Drizzt chooses to knock the PC unconscious so he can question that character later.

Guenhwyvar leads with charging pounce, leaping on whichever target Drizzt has initially designated as his quarry. She tries to maintain combat advantage throughout the fight to capitalize on her combat advantage ability.

Drizzt Do'Urden **Level 21 Solo Skirmisher**
Medium fey humanoid, drow XP 16,000

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +18; darkvision, see also *blind-fighter*
HP 764; **Bloodied** 382
AC 35; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 32
Saving Throws +5
Speed 7; see also *undisturbed stride*
Action Points 2

Twinkle (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant, Weapon**
+26 vs. AC; 2d8 + 13 damage (crit 22 + 3d8 + 5d10 radiant). *Miss:* 7 damage. Drizzt can change *Twinkle's* damage type to radiant as a free action.

Icingdeath (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Weapon**
+26 vs. AC; 2d8 + 13 damage (crit 22 + 3d8 + 5d6 cold). *Miss:* 7 damage. Drizzt can change *Icingdeath's* damage type to cold as a free action.

Taulmaril (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force, Weapon**
Ranged 20/40; targets two enemies; +24 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 9 force damage (crit 29 + 5d6 force damage, and the target is knocked prone).

Four-Fang Assault (standard; requires a weapon in each hand; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Drizzt makes three melee basic attacks (no more than two can be made with the same weapon), and he shifts 1 square before the first attack and after each attack. After the attacks are made, *Guenhwyvar* shifts 1 square, and then makes a melee attack as a free action.

Neutralizing Parry (immediate interrupt, when an enemy hits Drizzt with a melee attack; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Drizzt makes a melee basic attack that deals half damage on a hit, but on a hit, the target is also weakened and grants combat advantage until the start of its next turn.

Spine of the World Avalanche (standard; requires a weapon in each hand; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Weapon**
Drizzt makes up to five melee basic attacks, no more than two attacks on the same target. On each hit, the target is pushed 3 squares and knocked prone, and then Drizzt shifts 3 squares.

Darkfire (minor; encounter)
Ranged 10; +24 vs. Reflex; until the end of Drizzt's next turn, the target grants combat advantage to all attackers, and the target cannot benefit from invisibility or concealment.

Cloud of Darkness (minor; encounter) ✦ **Zone**
Close burst 1; this power creates a zone of darkness that remains in place until the end of Drizzt's next turn. The zone blocks line of sight for all creatures except Drizzt. Any creature entirely within the area, except for Drizzt and Guenhwyvar, is blinded.

Hunter's Quarry (minor; at-will)
Drizzt designates his closest enemy as his quarry until the end of the encounter or until he designates another quarry. Once per round, on a hit, Drizzt can deal 3d8 extra damage to his quarry.

Blind-Fighter
Enemies adjacent to Drizzt do not benefit from concealment, total concealment, or invisibility.

Undisturbed Stride
When Drizzt shifts, he can shift 3 squares instead of 1 square and he ignores difficult terrain.

Alignment Good **Languages** Common, Dwarven, Elven, Goblin
Skills Acrobatics +22, Dungeoneering +18, Nature +18, Stealth +28
Str 22 (+16) **Dex** 24 (+17) **Wis** 17 (+13)
Con 15 (+12) **Int** 15 (+12) **Cha** 13 (+11)
Equipment +5 *mithral chainmail, Twinkle* (scimitar), *Icingdeath* (scimitar), *Taulmaril* (longbow), *+4 elven cloak, Guenhwyvar, anklets of speed, mask of disguise, quiver of Anariel* (*endless quiver*), holy symbol (Mielikki)

Guenhwyvar **Level 21 Skirmisher**
Medium natural animate XP –

Initiative just after Drizzt **Senses** Perception +20; low-light vision
HP 50; **Bloodied** 25; see also *owner fortified*
AC 35; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 33
Speed 8; climb 6

Claw (standard; at-will)
+26 vs. AC; 2d8 + 9 damage, and Guenhwyvar shifts 1 square.

Bite (standard; at-will)
Targets a prone creature (includes combat advantage); +28 vs. AC; 2d10 + 10 damage, and the target is grabbed.

Charging Pounce (standard; at-will)
When Guenhwyvar charges and hits with her claw, she deals 2d8 extra damage and the target is knocked prone.

Combat Advantage
When Guenhwyvar has combat advantage, a target hit by her claw attack is knocked prone.

Owner Fortified
When activating Guenhwyvar, Drizzt can increase her number of hit points by taking the same amount of damage.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven (cannot speak)
Skills Acrobatics +22, Athletics +20, Stealth +22
Str 20 (+15) **Dex** 24 (+17) **Wis** 20 (+15)
Con 15 (+12) **Int** 6 (+12) **Cha** 10 (+10)

Features of the Area

Terraced Ledges: The land here is naturally sculpted into a series of terraces. Scaling the sheer 10-foot walls between them is possible, but challenging thanks to the thick sheet of ice clinging to the crumbling rock (Athletics DC 22 to climb).

Deep Snow: The top terrace, on which the tower sits, has the deepest snow. These squares are all difficult terrain, and all running jumps in these squares are treated as standing jumps. A character can push through or skip over the snow, ignoring the difficult terrain with a successful DC 22 Acrobatics or Athletics check made before moving. Failure by 5 or more means the character is restrained until the start of his or her next turn—he or she sinks into the deep powder.

Stone Ramps: Rough, naturally formed stone ramps break the crumbling stone ledges in places. The ramps are difficult terrain, which is indicated on the map.

Circle of Light: Inside the tower, a strange circle, etched in Dwarven runes, glows with a calming light. A creature that stands in the circle gains a +1 bonus to all defenses until the start of his or her next turn, as long as he or she means no harm to dwarves. Drizzt is aware of this effect, and takes advantage of it as often as he can.

Convincing Drizzt **Level 21**
Skill Challenge XP 8,400

As the legendary dark elf attacks, you are forced to wonder what provoked such a furious assault. Surely Drizzt can be persuaded to stand down and cease his attack.

The PCs must accomplish two goals: persuade Drizzt they are not working for House Mizzrym, and then convince him that they aren't working for Netheril either.

Complexity

2 (6 successes before 3 failures); but the challenge has two parts, and acquiring three successes allows the party to proceed from part 1 to part 2. Anytime the party reaches 3 total failures, however, the skill challenge ends in failure.

Special

A PC who spends a round standing in the circle of light within Drizzt's line of sight gains a +2 bonus on Diplomacy checks made as part of this skill challenge for the remainder of the encounter.

Part 1: We're Not with the Drow

Drizzt clearly believes you work for the drow of House Mizzrym, who seek Gauntlgrym. However he came to this conclusion, persuading him otherwise is vital.

The PCs attempt to persuade Drizzt they do not work for drow in this part of the skill challenge.

Special

If the PCs mention Ulsa Ironshield as their employer during this part of the skill challenge, part 1 ends and the players move to part 2. In response to this revelation, Drizzt spits, "An agent of Netheril? You expect that to be better than your working for the drow?"

Incremental Success

If the party acquires 3 successes before 3 failures, before mentioning Ulsa Ironshield, Drizzt believes they are not working for House Mizzrym. He asks the PCs who actually sent them. PCs who reveal their affiliation with Ulsa receive the same response from Drizzt described under Special above.

- ✦ If the PCs refuse to out their employer, Drizzt brings up Ulsa Ironshield, saying, "If you're not House Mizzrym's lackeys, are you dupes of Netheril and their agent, Ulsa Ironshield?" If the PCs confirm this suspicion, proceed to part 2. If they still guard their employer's identity, Drizzt says, "Your silence indicts you, and your Shadovar masters shall never see the treasures of Gauntlgrym."
- ✦ If the PCs persist in their protection of Ulsa, they don't get to go to part 2. They fail the skill challenge.

Primary Skills

Diplomacy, Dungeoneering, Insight

Secondary Skills

Perception, Streetwise

Diplomacy (DC 28, 1 success, no maximum, standard action)

You appeal to Drizzt simply and honestly, and make the case that you are not working on behalf of the drow.

Dungeoneering (DC 23, 1 success, 1 maximum, standard action)

You recall House Mizzrym now—a drow house with many contacts that specializes in stealing and selling magic items of all sorts. You reveal this knowledge to Drizzt with convincing disdain, making the claim that you would never work with a such a power.

Insight (DC 28, 1 success, 1 maximum, standard action)

You can see that your group is not what the dark elf was expecting, and you make an appeal on that basis to convince Drizzt you do not work for House Mizzrym.

Perception (DC 15, 0 successes, 1 maximum, free action)

The group gains a +2 bonus to its next Diplomacy check in this skill challenge.

You can see that Drizzt is pulling his blows somewhat, striking with the flats of his blades and avoiding potentially lethal strikes (see Tactics).

Streetwise (DC 28, 0 successes, 1 maximum, free action)

The group gains a +2 bonus to its next Diplomacy check in this skill challenge.

You recall hearing a rumor in the last town you were in, about an interest that a drow house had in learning the whereabouts of Gauntlgrym, but then, on further investigation, you learned that someone who wanted to link the drow to this quest was falsely spreading this rumor.

Part 2: We're Not with Netheril, Either

Drizzt seems convinced you're not working for the drow, but now seems to think you're working on behalf of Netheril and has redoubled his attacks.

The PCs attempt to assuage Drizzt's fears that they work for Netheril (which, if you're using the default scenario, is technically true). The PCs have to convince Drizzt they thought they were working for Mirabar, and would not knowingly aid the Netherese in plundering Gauntlgrym.

- ✦ The next 3 successes are spent trying to convince Drizzt that the heroes either didn't know about Ulsa's affiliations, or defending her enough that he realizes they have no clue who really hired them.

Primary Skills

Diplomacy, History, Insight

Secondary Skills

Arcana, Perception

Diplomacy (DC 28, 1 success, no maximum, standard action)

You eloquently plead your innocence about Ulsa, claiming she seemed genuine and her knowledge of Gauntlgrym was so thorough that she seemed completely authentic.

History (DC 28, 1 success, 1 maximum, standard action)

You recall mention of another dwarf clan called Ironshield, known in the dwarven annals for a legacy of betrayal. A group of Ironshield dwarves, just a single generation back, led Netherese assassins into their clan's stronghold in a successful bid for power under ongoing Netherese control.

Insight (DC 23, 1 success, 1 maximum, standard action)

You can see Drizzt is incensed by the idea of Netheril gaining access to Gauntlgrym—almost more so than the thought of drow seeking its riches. You can use that to bolster your defense of your position.

Arcana (DC 23, 0 successes, 1 maximum, free action)

The group gains a +2 bonus to its next Diplomacy check in this skill challenge.

From what you understand of dwarven magic, there's reason to believe that Drizzt is correct, and that Netheril would indeed be interested in the sorts of magic the ancient dwarves used on a regular basis. Giving Drizzt credit for his suspicions gives your protest more weight.

Perception (DC 15, 0 successes, 1 maximum, free action)

The group gains a +2 bonus to its next Diplomacy check in this skill challenge.

You can see that Drizzt is pulling his blows somewhat, striking with the flats of his blades and avoiding potentially lethal strikes (see Tactics).

Conclusion

Success (6 successes before 3 failures)

Drizzt draws back from the fight, using an Action Point to gain some distance if he has one remaining. He sheathes his scimitars and holds up a hand, asking for the PCs to stand down. The fight is over, unless the PCs continue it.

Failure (3 failures before 6 successes)

Drizzt might believe that the PCs are dupes in a larger scheme, but they're too dangerous and powerful to be allowed to continue, and he continues to fight. The PCs can attempt the challenge again, staring again in the part during which they failed.

Using Guenhwyvar

Guenhwyvar is a powerful onyx figurine—like a *figurine of wondrous power*—that allows Drizzt to conjure forth the magical panther's living form. If you come up with a reason to use Drizzt without Guenhwyvar already activated, he requires a minor action to conjure. The figurine then becomes her living form, and she appears within 3 squares of Drizzt in a space that requires no squeezing on her part. When Drizzt conjures Guenhwyvar, he can take up to 150 damage to grant her the same amount of hit points. When reduced to 0 hit points or fewer, Guenhwyvar resumes her form as an onyx panther figurine and cannot be conjured again until Drizzt has taken an extended rest. Of course, any power that allows Drizzt to influence or manipulate Guenhwyvar on the battlefield requires that she already be conjured forth.

Development

The goal of this adventure isn't to wipe out your party with Drizzt, or for your heroes to slaughter one of the Realms' most dedicated defenders. Instead, it's to give your adventurers the opportunity to see how they stack up against one of the most legendary figures in Faerûn. If your PCs are attacking Drizzt to kill him, have him withdraw after a time, with a promise to return and make sure they will not succeed in pillaging Gauntlgrym. Drizzt should return with powerful allies at a later, more inconvenient time for a second showdown. But if your group is typical, it's unlikely this fight ends in a bloodbath.

When all is said and done, you have a fantastic launch point here for an epic adventure against the most powerful forces Netheril can bring to bear. Raavastas are nasty enemies, and Prince Rivalen Tanthul should be an epic threat who could be the capstone villain in an adventure pitting the PCs against Netheril. Drizzt might aid them in some way, such as with a distracting campaign against their shared enemies.

Other Hooks

The map of Gauntlgrym hook is only one of many that could bring the PCs in conflict with Drizzt Do'Urden. Consider one of these hooks if the default scenario isn't right for your campaign:

✦ Some force of evil has used powerful magic to subjugate Drizzt's soul with the soul of a dark, epic-tier villain. The PCs have tracked the rogue Drizzt to a remote tower on the fringes of the Spine of the World and must recover him, intact, before they seek out those who did this deed. The skill challenge can be modified to bring Drizzt's true consciousness back to the fore. Whether this removes his affliction or simply allows the PCs to capture him without defeating him in combat is up to you.

✦ An informant and villain the PCs have long sought has been tracked to this tower, where they find he's already been captured—by Drizzt Do'Urden! But Drizzt has plans of his own for the villain, and refuses to hand him over to the PCs for any reason, or even to question him. Drizzt has reasons of his own, but has been swayed by a false tale spun by the villain he captured, and believes the PCs want the figure for nefarious purposes. Now the PCs must fight the hostile dark elf before he'll surrender his prize. The skill challenge becomes a method of convincing Drizzt of a shared goal or the PCs' good intentions.

✦ At Lolth's behest, a powerful cabal of drow has created a dark clone of Drizzt, who has been rampaging across the north, terrorizing communities and slaughtering anyone who opposes it. This creation of vile magic is identical in every way to the legendary hero, and the true Drizzt's reputation has been greatly tarnished. Further, no one has seen or heard from Drizzt in months, leading even his friends to wonder if the hero has lost his mind. The truth is that the same drow group captured him months ago, and he remains their prisoner and the source material for the ritual that created his evil clone. He must remain alive for the clone to function. The PCs have tracked the evil Drizzt clone to this hidden redoubt in the mountains, and must defeat it before they can find out who created it and where the real Drizzt can be found! The skill challenge becomes an appeal to the seed of goodness within the clone's consciousness. If it can be convinced to change its ways or broken in mind, it can help in locating the real Drizzt.

About the Authors

Chris Sims works as a game designer and web specialist for Wizards of the Coast. His recent credits include the 4th Edition *Monster Manual*® and *Dungeon Master's Guide*®, as well as the *Forgotten Realms*® *Campaign Guide*.

Chris Youngs is the Editor-in-Chief of *D&D Insider*™, which means he usually only gets to read D&D® stuff all day long. He's pretty excited that he got to write something for *Dungeon*® again.

The Mailbag

by Mike Mearls
Illustration by Raven Mimura

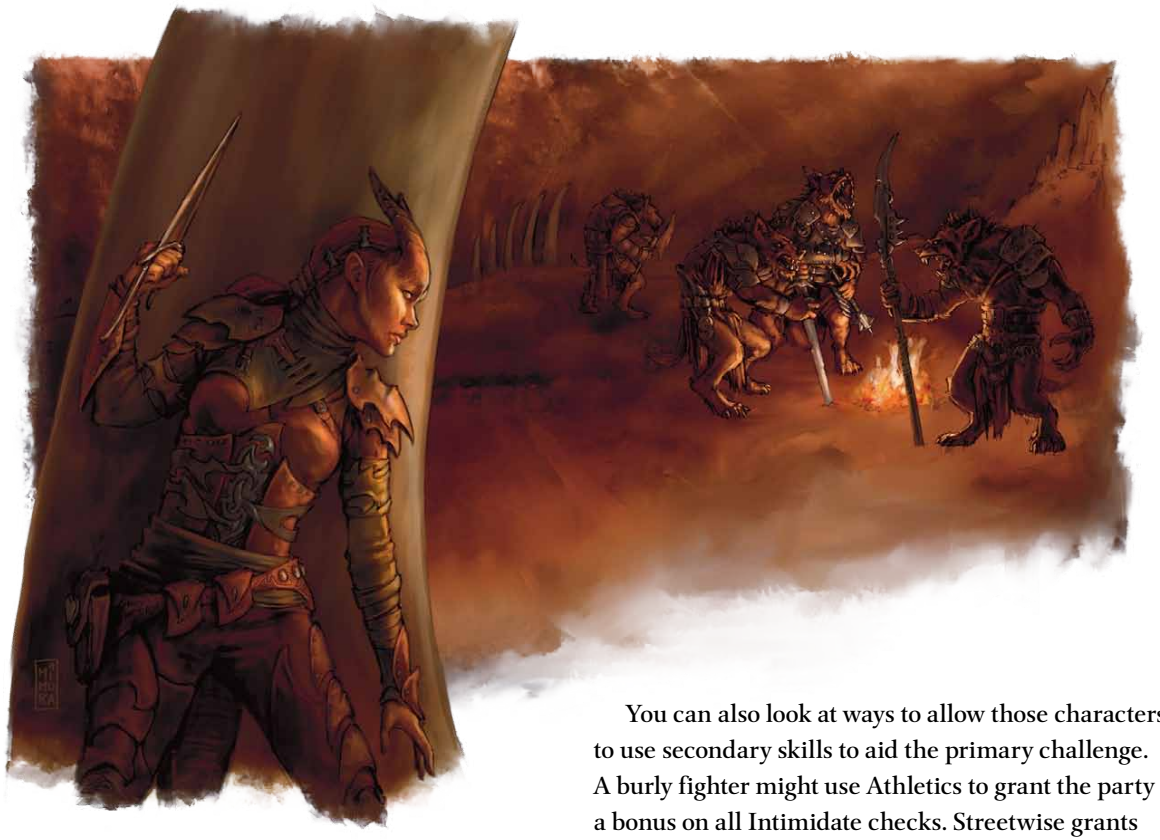
It's been a year since this column kicked off. In celebration we're throwing open the email box and answering reader questions. It's been fun working on this column. The insight from readers is a useful part of shaping the game and mapping out new directions. Without further ado, on to the email!

Skill Challenges for Everyone

Robert Uccello writes:

It's been my experience that announced Skill Challenges tend to draw groans of distaste, either from the STR/CON characters or the INT/CHA characters, based on the nature of the challenge. So I stopped announcing them, but I tend to wind up with the latter group just adding failures in physical challenges, or the former group just quietly sitting out of the social challenges. What is the best way to get the non-optimal characters to feel like they belong in that part of the game?

People have a natural tendency to avoid things they are bad at. That's why I spend more time playing Halo than running marathons. Particularly in a game like D&D, where nobody likes to mess up and cost the group progress, there's a big push to remain on the sideline.



You can try to find creative ways to provide options for a variety of skills, but that's not always possible. The next best thing is to focus on short skill challenges that come and go quickly enough that the players who aren't necessarily engaged by one aren't stuck watching the game for an hour.

You can also look at ways to allow those characters to use secondary skills to aid the primary challenge. A burly fighter might use Athletics to grant the party a bonus on all Intimidate checks. Streetwise grants a bonus to Diplomacy by allowing a character to remember rumors or stories of how best to deal with someone. Perhaps the duke is susceptible to flattery, granting the PCs a bonus to Diplomacy checks when they use that tactic. A History check allows a PC to remember a particularly gruesome, local superstí-

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tion that another character making a Bluff check can work into his lie.

The key lies in flexibility. Think of what the characters are good at, particularly things the players like to emphasize, and think of indirect ways to bring them into an encounter. Better yet, encourage the players to think of those things.

Overachievement

Russell Jones asks:

What can you do to award extraordinary success for a check in a skill challenge? For example, the wizard deciphering clues around a deadly magical trap rolls a 20, and beats the Arcana DC by more than 10. What would you recommend for that kind of combination of good fortune and skill?

My current house rules include better bonuses on the same or related skills, and even additional successes in some cases to speed up the challenge. Is that in line with what you'd recommend?

Extra successes or added bonuses to skill checks are both fine ways to reward luck and high skill bonuses. You can also look at the specific skill challenge to pull out some more flavorful options. For instance:

If a PC beats a trap's DC by 10 or more, he can cause the trap to attack a target of his choice.

An NPC reveals additional information regarding some other mystery or encounter that the PCs have to deal with.

The group does not take a failure if they miss their next check.

The PCs earn a small reward or respite. For example, while trying to sneak into an evil lord's castle, they find a hidden cave where they can take a short or extended rest without fear of discovery.

While haggling over an item, the merchant offers the PCs a good deal on a different item they also want to buy.

Benefits like this require a little more work and creativity, but they help the skill challenge feel more organic and less mechanical. You can also combine a story-oriented reward with the mechanical rewards you mentioned above.

Of course, you might consider added drawbacks for PCs who roll 1s. Even if they still get a success, they must now deal with some added complexity. For example, while chasing a villain through the streets, the PC who rolls a 1 crashes into the captain of the guard, knocking him into a mud puddle and ruining his pristine, new tabard. Needless to say, the guard captain has an interest in making things difficult for the PCs later in the campaign.

The Case of the Mysterious, Growing DCs

Joel Ross has the honor of asking a question that's on a lot of minds:

To elaborate on your "Math Behind the DCs" article, can you talk a little bit about how those DCs scale across levels? Your explanation was very helpful for understanding what a "difficult" DC for a level 1 character is, but what about a level 11 character? Specifically, an 11th level character has gotten at least a +1 to all ability scores (up to a +3 for primary scores most likely), and has likely acquired a number of items and powers that aid in skill checks. Does this not change the math fairly significantly?

Similarly, Could you elaborate on why skill check DCs scale every 3rd level rather than at levels that match PC power upgrades – why are the checks at early Paragon (levels 11 and 12) just as easy as those at the end of Heroic (level 10)? Shouldn't the checks be taken up a notch for the next tier (particularly as that tier comes with ability score boosts and frequently a paragon path bonus)?

The math does change over the course of several levels, though it is difficult to predict exactly how it changes in all cases. For instance, a fighter might increase his Strength score fairly consistently, but if he starts with a 10 Intelligence, it reaches 12 only at 21st level. The burden on the math isn't necessarily that skill bonuses all go up at the same rate. The problem is that they go up at different rates.

That's why the table breaks levels up into bands of three levels. The idea is to try to compensate for those outside variables beyond the half-level modifier. Of course, that solution still doesn't address the core problem, that the gap between your best and worst skill (both for one PC and the party as a whole) grows wider and wider.

The table does try to account for some of that gap, as the difference between a hard and easy DC increases with level. It's fairly obvious, however, that that spread doesn't always work out especially well in play.

For now, I suggest increasing the hard DCs by 5 at heroic tier, 7 at paragon tier, and 9 at epic tier. Similarly, boost the moderate DCs by 2 at paragon tier and 4 at epic tier. Of course, those are only rough approximations.

At the end of the day, I think the flaw might lie in presenting the table as a single value at each level. It might be smarter to present a range, to make it clear

to DMs that the easy/moderate/hard continuum represents a range, not three discreet points of skill.

Ability Checks in Skill Challenges

Vince Mason asks:

What kind of DCs are appropriate for a character making ability checks in a skill challenge (for example, a tactical decision is needed, and a Wisdom check is used instead of a skill, or a character wants to use a catapult as a part of a skill challenge, and uses an intelligence check)? I ask this because there is not a skill associated with battlefield tactics, and so I often use ability checks in my game. To account for the lack of training, I have simply lowered the dcs by anywhere from 3 to 5. What is your opinion?

The easiest thing to do is shift all of the DCs down by one difficulty category. Thus, a "hard" ability score check uses the moderate DC, and so on. Obviously, for an easy DC you can't shift any lower, but that category is meant for untrained PCs who are, essentially, making an ability score check with a +0 or +1 bonus at heroic tier.

Another trick you can use is to find ways to justify using skills to match the intended use. Using a catapult might require a Perception check to determine the correct distance for a shot. Planning an ambush could be a combination of Nature to find the best terrain to hide in and Insight to determine the enemy commander's intentions and likely path.

Two Questions in One

Scot from Texas has two questions:

How do you handle Passive Perception and Insight during skill challenges? After all, if the hard DC is 15, then you only need one character in the party with a +5 in the skill to auto succeed without even taking an action. It's kind of boring to read through a challenge saying "Okay, just from your passives you get 1, 2 ... 3 total successes to start. Here's what you see ..."

Passive Perception is there to handle situations where the PCs aren't making a special effort to find something. For instance, it helps a character hear the orc sneaking around a corner. However, if the hollow space hidden at the bottom of a chest is DC 15, the character has to make a check to specifically uncover that hiding place.

My two rules of thumb with passive checks are this: By asking for a check, am I tipping off the players to something? Some players can strike a sharp divide between player and character knowledge, but sometimes it's more fun to avoid the issue entirely.

Does the character have a chance to passively make the check without taking any special effort? When the orc sneaks around the corner, it's making noise. We need to know whether the PC hears it. For a hidden compartment, nobody who simply looks at the chest can possibly know there's something hidden in there. A character would have to tap on the chest's interior or otherwise interact with it to figure it out.

Skill challenges are best suited to active challenges. A passive check might give some useful piece of info or an advantage in the challenge, but it shouldn't speak directly to success or failure.

Scot then asks:

*Have you considered alternate methods of failure besides the 3 misses? Perhaps having X rounds go by instead? In a recent challenge, our party tried to free people trapped in a runaway wagon. We started with two failed athletics checks to catch up and then a failed check to pick a lock by our rogue. This resulted in the wagon crashing and us failing the skill challenge. While I understand that the "3 misses" is an abstraction (failing to pick the lock didn't *cause* the crash, it was just supposed to represent us taking too much time), it still feels a bit off.*

As it happens, I played through that same exact skill challenge! A time limit is a fine way to measure failure, and it's a great way to encourage all the characters, particularly PCs who are likely to fail, to take an active role. As a rule of thumb, determine how many total skill checks the characters get in the skill challenge before time runs out. It can be as low as 5 for a fast challenge and 15 for a longer one. Then, assume that the characters need to succeed on just over 50% of those checks for a complexity 1 challenge, 60% for complexity 3, and 80% for complexity 5. That's the PCs' target of successes before the challenge ends.

The nice thing about this approach is that you can throw a high complexity challenge at the PCs with a much smaller number of checks. You should also require each PC to take an action and perhaps place a cap on how many checks or aid another actions a given PC can make. I'd suggest dividing the total number of checks by the number of characters -1, rounding up. That approach gives really skilled PCs a chance to shine by making multiple checks and gives the players the room to use a few aid another checks.

However, if the characters use too many aid attempts, they are likely to run out of time before finishing.

The Gang's All Here

Mike McEachron writes:

When dealing with skill challenges that aren't pressing in action, such as finding a way to open a door or forcing information from a captured NPC, are there any bits of information that can be used to ensure that the entire party participates in the skill challenge rather than just the party's best guy for the job or are these kind of skill challenges just flawed in their design?

You might want to avoid a skill challenge in that case. Otherwise, it's hard to come up with a good reason why the PCs need to spread the workload. If you don't want a time limit or sense of urgency but do want to involve all the characters, either create a skill challenge that requires a broad array of skills or look at using a puzzle.

Puzzles are really, really good tools for pushing the entire group to work together. The players can talk through a solution, and there's no penalty for proposing a solution or brainstorming ideas. Players can contribute without feeling that a weak skill bonus or character ability gets in the way.

Make 'Em Sweat

Dan Head writes:

It seems like my players are always getting through their skill challenges too easily. I'm worried that there's no suspense involved. How can I push them out of their comfort zone? I want them to have to think, in character, but not necessarily force them to use their WORST skills.

The best way to make a player think in-character is to challenge them in-character. Skill challenges do work against that in some ways, since they push players to think about skills and bonuses. On the other hand, players are invested in those skills and want to use them. Where's the middle ground?

Nothing in the rules says that a successful skill challenge hands the PCs a victory on a platter. Instead, a skill challenge might give the PCs the tools they need to succeed. The players still need to put those tools together.

For example, imagine a negotiation that you carry out in-character but also combine with a skill challenge the characters need to discover the password to the thieves' guild. They can search a missing thief's hideout for clues, and they can also ask around town for information.

For the skill challenge, each successful check gives the PCs one more clue to the password. However, even after succeeding at the skill challenge and getting all the clues, the characters must still piece them together. The puzzle is easier with all the information, but it still requires some work.

Here's a rough example, using the thieves' guild password:

The PCs find a worn piece of parchment. A Perception check shows faint writing on it, as if the ink wore away after someone carried it in their pocket for a long time. The partial writing says (with blanks representing illegible letters), "Pwd is t---e ---r-s." On a failed check, the PCs decipher fewer letters.

A Streetwise check reveals that the guildmaster is from a dwarf stronghold called Silver Crag. He's also known to be an ardent worshipper of Moradin. On a failed check, the PCs learn only that he's from Silver Crag.

A Streetwise, History, or Religion check reveals that the temple to Moradin in Silver Crag is known as the Vault of Three Swords. On a failure, the PCs learn only that the temple is renowned for the magical swords its priests have forged for three different dwarf heroes.

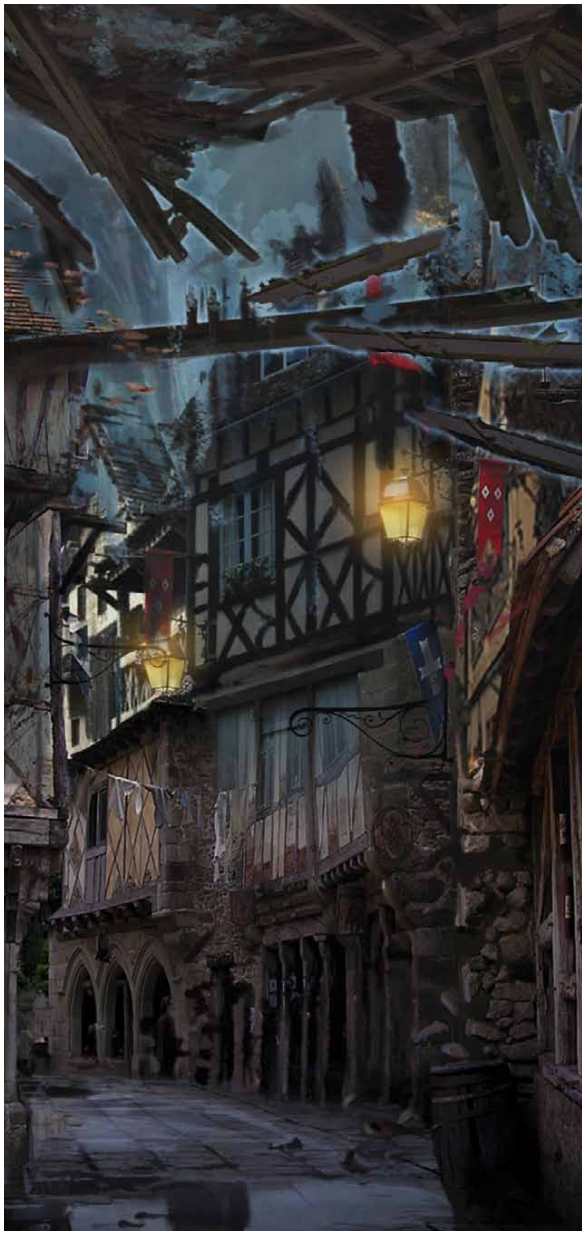
This is a rough example, but I hope that it shows the process you can employ to point the PCs toward an answer without giving it to them. The information is all there, and by the end the answer might be obvious. The skill challenge only leads the PCs closer to the answer. You can make the challenge even more vivid by having the characters meet specific NPCs or visit certain locations to make their checks. For instance, to research the temple of Moradin in Silver Crag, the party's wizard visits the local temple, speaks with the high priest, and searches through the library. Her skill check represents that effort, after you roleplay in-character the library visit.

About the Author

Mike Mearls is the Lead Developer for the Dungeons & Dragons roleplaying game. His recent credits include *H1: Keep on the Shadowfell* and *Player's Handbook II* (v.3.5).

Save My Game
Organizing the Toy Chests

BY STEPHEN RADNEY-MACFARLAND
illustration by Rob Alexander



The game is approaching its sixth hour. The characters have just reached another milestone, another daily magic item back on line, they have another action point, and the players are raring and ready to go on. Sure, healing surges are running near empty, but the enemy's on the run—somewhere behind that huge double door at the end of the hall, the one guarded by the skeletons and the death knight that are now a pile of bones at the characters' feet.

Problem is, you didn't prepare for the game to go into its sixth hour.

It's exciting to have a group of players so engaged in your game that they've thrown all semblance of scheduling out the window and want to push forward through "one last door." It can also be a tad frustrating for you, the Dungeon Master. You only grabbed enough miniatures and *Dungeon Tiles* before the game for five encounters. You know what's in the room beyond. You can grab the stat blocks off of the *D&D Compendium*, but you find yourself scrambling for minis and tiles. Clawing though the jumble, you can't find the exact ones you need. You end up using a zombie instead of the mummy lord and a rage drake and a dire wolf instead of the pair of zombie white dragons for the mummy's servants, and instead of the ornate and complicated gothic chamber full of statues and braziers, you settle for a large, rectangular room. It's not a game killer, to be sure, but it doesn't present your crowning combat at its best, either. If only your miniatures, tiles, and other game tools were better organized!

Dungeons & Dragons is a game rich in components. There are components of the imagination: worlds, characters, adventure, and encounters. And there are physical components: books, screens, dice, miniatures, dungeon tiles, and condition markers. Arguably you don't need all of these, but all are tools that add to the game. Like any kind of tools, they need to be organized so that you can find the right one at the proper time. This month we look at tips and strategies for organizing your tools, focusing primarily on those numerous tiles and miniatures that are probably cluttering your game area.

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Taming the Jumble of Dungeon Tiles

Like many long-time DMs, I have numerous mapping tools: wet-erase battle mats, dry erase gridded interlocking tiles, three-dimensional dungeon pieces, and many, many sets of D&D *Dungeon Tiles*. My favorite is the tiles by far, and not just because they're a Wizards of the Coast product. Their evocative art, portability, price, and ease of customization make them the ideal mapping solution for me. I typically buy at least three of each set, sometimes four. Since I've been doing that since the start, I have a lot of tiles.

The modular nature of *Dungeon Tiles* can also make them a little difficult to store and organize. Around the office, there are a couple camps of *Dungeon Tiles* storage and use. I happen to use both.

One camp uses drawers or bins as storage. This takes a set of those plastic storage drawers that you can buy at any Wal-Mart, Target, or craft store (they usually come in a cube of three drawers). Use each drawer for a set or grouping. Personally, I tend to organize my drawers rather rigidly to optimize the drawer's space and so I can easily find the tile I need, but *Dungeon Tiles* are sturdy enough that you can also store them rather haphazardly. I store the majority of my tiles using this method. On the pro side, it takes up less space than other methods of storage and you can find a broad group of tiles rather easily. On the con side, it's easy for tiles to become a jumble, and unless you are meticulous in your organizing, it can become a big toy box that you will paw through constantly in search of that one piece you need.

The other camp uses the original die-cut frames to store the tiles. They keep them in the original packaging, punch tiles out when needed, and carefully place them back in the original die-cut template when they're done. I keep one of each tile set stored this way. I do this for a couple of reasons. If I'm writing an adventure or delve that may eventually be published, it makes it easy for me to put together maps that require only two different *Dungeon Tiles* sets. Also, if I'm having trouble finding one particular tile that I need in my tile drawers, and I only need one, I can find it quickly and move on. This is especially useful for those small 1x1 or 1x2 tiles with a specific terrain feature depicted on them. No matter how well you organize your tile drawers, those buggers can be a pain.

A word of advice, if you use the mixed method: When you take a tile from your die-cut sets, mark that tile in some way. I usually put a single, round sticker on the side I'm not using. This makes it easy to remember and find the tile that goes back into the die-cut when you're done with the tiles.

The biggest pro of the die-cut method is organization. On the con side, the more your use the tiles,

the harder it becomes to replace them back into the template. Eventually you will wear out the die-cut templates, and you'll end up putting the set into envelopes.

Both of these methods are great for storage and organization at home, but what about DMs who run games away from their home base? The simplest method is to gather up all the tiles that you need and place them in a large envelope or a large plastic bag. I tend to go a step further. I have a number of sturdy, clear plastic envelopes, the kind you find in any office supply store. I use an envelope for each combat encounter and place the tiles I need for each encounter in their own envelope. Then I take a Post-It note, write the encounter name or number on the sticky side, and stick it on the inside of the envelope so I can easily see what encounter lives in which envelope even when multiple encounters use similar tiles. These folders store easily among books and other supplies in a bag or a backpack, and then I'm off to run the game.

Bringing Discipline to Toy Soldiers

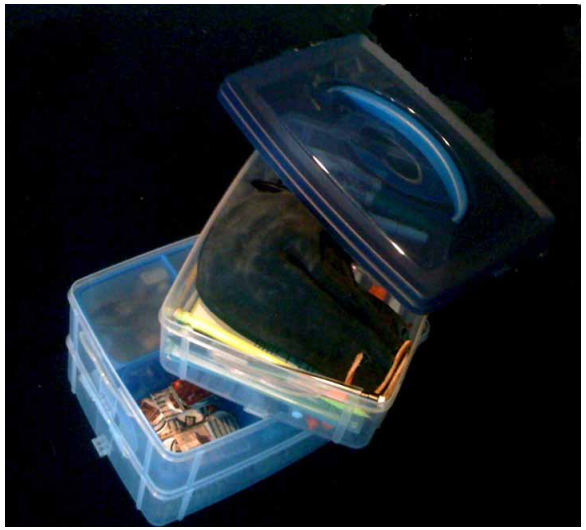
I've used miniatures and battle grids for miniatures since my 1st Edition AD&D days, so I've spent a lot of years wrangling and organizing miniatures. Of course, during most of those years, minis were made of metal, so let me tell you, you kids have it easy. In comparison, *D&D Miniatures* are easy to store and organize. You can dump them in a box without worrying about paint chipping or arms breaking off. You can throw them in a ZipLoc bag, smash them into your backpack, and skip off to the local game store for a quick game. There's no need to painstakingly place them in a foam-lined carrying case for transport. There is a downside, of course, if you want to call it that. Collecting *D&D Miniatures* is addictive. Before long, you'll have a small army of the things, and you'll need a way to organize them.

Once upon a time, I stored my *D&D Miniatures* by their set. This is fine for the collector, but as I accumulated more minis and wanted to speed up my D&D prep, I started asking around the office to see how other folks were organizing their minis. As I suspected, about all of my fellow DMs were organizing minis by category in either bins or drawers. Some used the creature's origin, others used thematic categories like "orcs and goblins," "demons," or "creepy crawlies" (bugs and slimes and such). The key was to group them into categories where all you were doing was sorting through a small pile of minis rather than a large one.

Because *D&D Miniatures* are sturdy, most of these storage strategies involve just dumping the miniatures into large bins and digging though the pile to find what you need. That's all well and good, but I wanted to organize them in a way that lets me find what I need with a glance rather than panning for the proper miniatures in a pool of plastic and paint.

I had already started tagging duplicate miniatures with round color stickers. The simple stickers I use come in red, green, yellow, and blue. The colors correspond to boxes on my initiative cards that I use to track hit points and effects, so I can always keep multiple monsters straight. Because I use this method, I went through my minis and pulled out four of each (sometimes I took as many as 12, if I had a lot of them and thought they would make good minion miniatures). Then I organized them by types, focusing on the types that worked well in my home campaign. If I had any leftover minis of the same type, I put them in storage.

For example, in my campaign, the characters eventually find out that their home is about to be invaded by the armies of an incredibly powerful hobgoblin khan with the aid of his duergar allies. Because various types of goblins and duergar are often encountered together, I have a drawer dedicated to hobgoblin, goblin, bugbear, and duergar miniatures. It also holds some duergar war machines and some barghests, because they also fit my campaign's theme. I place them four at a time in one of my storage drawers. The first four I adorn with stickers. The rest I keep blank. I never need to track hit points on minions and rarely need to track effects on them, so more stickers are unnecessary. Then I line them up like a regiment of toy soldiers in the drawer. This way I can look into my storage and grab what I need. I know where to put them when I'm done because there will be conspicuous empty spaces among the minis in the drawer.



While preparing for a game, I take the figures that I need out of the storage drawers and put them in one or two containers, depending on where the game will be held. If I'm running at home, I put them in the minis box—an ornate wooden box that I ceremoniously lift up to the table a dig through every time new monsters scramble into the battle. My players know that when that box comes up, trouble follows. It's fun to see the looks on their faces, the dread and surprise in their eyes, when I raise up that box, especially if their characters are already in dire straits. But I'm evil.

When I run a game somewhere else, be it a player's house or one of the local game stores, my carrying case is a little more traveling friendly, which brings me to my next topic.

All the Other Stuff

Through the various bedrooms I inhabited in my parents' houses, studio apartments, dorm rooms, cubicles, and the space my wife allows me to have, my gaming career has been a struggle to use available space effectively. Even though I have more space now than I ever had in the past, I also have more gaming stuff, so it seems like the struggle just keeps getting more challenging all the time.

I have used briefcases, backpacks, milk crates, tackleboxes, and filing boxes to organize my gaming stuff. While my needs may now be greater than ever, I also have better tools at my disposal. And I have one cultural phenomenon to thank—scrapbooking.

Since scrapbooking's rise in popularity, a number of organizing boxes, drawers, and carrying cases have appeared on the market. My favorite one by far is called Snap 'N Stack, from a company called Snapware. These are available in medium-size rectangular and modular bins about 2 inches deep. One bin fits atop and snaps onto another bin or onto a lid with a handle. Some of the bins also come with a couple of three-section dividers, each with its own lid, which is perfect for carrying counters, small bits of terrain, dice, tiny miniatures, and condition markers. I have a few sets of these and use them to store dice, initiative cards, pencils, wet and dry erase markers, three-dimensional terrain, and miniatures I take with me for "away games." When I'm ready to go, I just grab the bins I need, snap them together, snap on a lid, and I'm ready to ramble.

While I absolutely love the organization methods I use and think that you should give them a shot, especially if you feel frustrated and scattered while preparing for a game or running one, the best organizational method is the one that works for you and speaks to your own space needs and idiosyncrasies. Feel free to drop me a line or post a comment on my Wizards Community home page and share your thoughts on organizing your toys or anything else Save My Game-related.

This Weekend the Mailbag Moves to the Phone

In case you haven't heard, this weekend, October 8–11, between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. PDT, we are doing something special for DM support here at Wizards of the Coast. We are opening a special DM Hotline where you can call and get DMing advice from one of the many skilled Dungeon Masters who work at Wizards of the Coast. The phone number to call is (800) 878-3326. Keep in mind the hours that the hotline is open (that's 2–6 p.m. Pacific time) and that we are only taking calls from inside the United States.

I'll be joining a number of our fantastic DMs to take calls and answer questions, so give us a ring. We will do our best to save your game. Throughout my stint, I'll keep notes and share some of the best questions in next month's column!

For those who can't participate on the phone because they live outside of the US or because their schedule doesn't allow it, I've made a Save My Game group on the Wizards of the Coast community website. Feel free to join up, ask your questions, and I'll endeavor to give you a prompt answer between calls and games this weekend, maybe saving some of the best for next month's column.

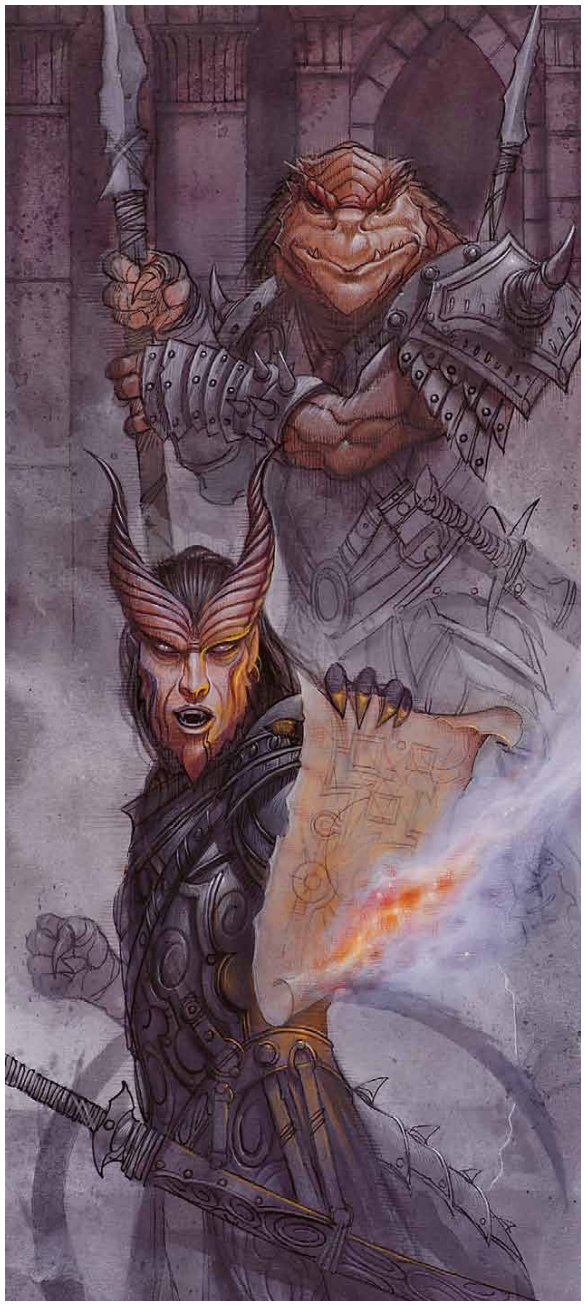
About the Author

Born on a stormy Christmas day, in our nation's capital, during the Nixon administration, the stars were definitely wrong when Stephen Radney-MacFarland came screaming into the world. Spending most of his impressionable years as a vagabond and ne're-do-well, Stephen eventually settled in the Northwest to waste his life on roleplaying games.

Once that RPGA guy, Stephen is now a developer in RPG R&D where he doesn't create the traps... he just makes them deadlier. He also teaches a class on roleplaying design for the Art Institute of Seattle, molding the minds of young and upcoming designers. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

The D&D World

BY JAMES WYATT, ANDY COLLINS, AND CHRIS PERKINS
illustration by Wayne England



This month's column came out of a conversation among the three managers in the D&D R&D department a couple of weeks ago. Andy Collins, Chris Perkins, and I were talking about the Nentir Vale and the assumed "world" it's in -- and how we've adapted that world to make it our own for the campaigns we're running. "That would be a great Dungeon article," I said. So here it is.

The D&D World

Not really a geographical place, the D&D world as it's presented in our books so far is more like a set of assumptions and a catalog of names. Some of those assumptions are spelled out on page 150 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*: The world is a fantastic place, it's ancient and mysterious, monsters are everywhere but adventurers are exceptional, and so on. The names are spread out through the catalog of D&D books and articles: the ancient tiefling empire of Bael Turath, the fallen eladrin city of Cendriane, the demon prince Orcus and Bahamut the god of justice, the Dawnforge Mountains, the Cairngorm Peaks, and the Winterbole and Harken Forests that define the boundaries of the Nentir Vale.

The map on page 206 of the *DMG* is the only map of a large stretch of the D&D world that we've published, presenting the Nentir Vale as an example of how you can combine those assumptions and names into a setting for your campaign. It's the default setting for the adventure series we published (starting with *Keep on the Shadowfell* and wrapping up this month with *Prince of Undeath*), although the adventures assume that by the time the characters reach paragon levels (with adventure *P1: King of the Trollhaunt Warrens*), they're broadening their horizons beyond the expanse of the Nentir Vale.

The point of this default D&D world is not that you should use the map of the Nentir Vale exactly as it's presented and carefully hoard scraps of information as the "canonical" history of the world. Rather, the world is yours to do with as you please—to make it your own and build your campaign on its framework. But the best way to explain that is by way of example.

Greenbrier in the D&D World

James Wyatt

The campaign that I've developed in this column is my own version of the D&D world. I don't know where the village of Greenbrier lies in relation to Fallcrest or the rest of the Nentir Vale, or even if the Nentir Vale exists as such in my version of the world. But it's clearly the same world as the default world of D&D. It has the same pantheon of gods, the same roster of primordials, demon lords, archdevils, and archfey, and fundamentally the same history—with one important detail that I've filled in.

My world shares all the baseline assumptions outlined on page 150 of the *DMG*. In particular, I've emphasized "The Civilized Races Band Together" by making the Eldest of Greenbrier an elf, since the elves moved closer to the village when the Burning Wood started burning. And monsters, of course, are everywhere, including all throughout the chasm that lies just outside the characters' starting village!

I have talked about the rise and fall of Nerath, linking the empire's founding to the binding of the Speaker in Dreams and its fall to that monster's escape. I also decided that I wanted Arkhosia and Bael Turath to have been geographically as well as chronologically distant from the region of my campaign so that I could keep the campaign focused on the aberrant monstrosity and its binding rather than dealing with the ancient history of these fallen empires. Even though they're remote, they're still a part of my world's history. If a player had wanted to play a dragonborn character, I would have allowed it. I've described dragonborn as "heirs of an empire far older than Nerath," though now they're widely scattered.

I'm planning for the characters to visit Cendriane in the Feywild, and I want to link it to the ancient fey empire that produced the Vast Gate beneath Firestorm Peak. I plan to take them to Gloomwrought, pretty much as it appears in *Manual of the Planes*. These are ancillary parts of the D&D world—parts of the broader universe of planes—but they're easy for me to use as I please, dropping them wherever in their respective planes it's convenient for me.

There's not any need for me to use the map of the Nentir Vale from the DMG, because I've built my own geography around Greenbrier. I could easily drop names from this map into my geography if I wanted to, the way I've stolen the name of the Forgotten Realms' Silverymoon for my large northern city. I might end up using Hammerfast, for example, because Mike Mearls wrote a really cool book describing it as a fascinating adventure site. With two dwarves in my party, a visit to Hammerfast would make a lot of sense. I'll have to see if I can work that into my campaign arc.

So am I violating "canon" by moving Hammerfast from its position in the Nentir Vale to someplace in the Frosthorn Peaks? Of course not. It's my world, and I can use it as I please.

The most prominent way in which I've taken the core world and made it mine is by adding that one important detail I mentioned: the Speaker in Dreams. The two most significant events in the history of my little region of "the D&D world" were the binding and release of this aberrant monstrosity, and those twin events put their stamp on my entire campaign.

The rest is details, and it's much easier for me to pull details from the wealth of resources in our published books and marshal them in service of my own story than it is to make up those details myself. I could have invented my own ancient dragonborn empire and called it something other than Arkhosia, but would that have improved the story of my campaign? Only if it were relevant to the events surrounding the Speaker in Dreams. By giving me an abundance of names, places, and events, D&D books and articles help me bring the world of my campaign to life without spending countless hours building a world that's really just a backdrop to the really important events that the player characters are involved in.

Blackmere in the D&D World

Andy Collins

As work on 4th Edition D&D was drawing to a close in early 2008, I had a new campaign in mind. Spurred by comments from some of my more vocal players, I decided to return to the homebrew setting that I'd crafted back in 1999 for my first 3rd Edition campaign: the world of Blackmere.

That said, I still wanted to adopt many of the core conceits of the new D&D world discussed in the "Wizards Presents" books published in late 2007 and early 2008. I wanted a good place for dragonborn, an in-world explanation for the differences between eladrin and elves, and a backstory that accounted for the various fallen empires of the past. How to accomplish this while staying true to the world that my players had come to love?

Ultimately, I used three tricks to achieve this goal: renaming, selective retroactive continuity, and a significant time shift. Coupled with a managed approach to incorporating D&D world elements (translation: I picked certain elements to incorporate and ignored others), these tricks helped me retain what made the Blackmere setting special while ben-

efiting from many of the exciting new ideas presented in the game's sourcebooks.

Renaming is one of the oldest tricks in the DM arsenal. Adapting (some might say stealing) a great idea while changing just enough identifying details to make it your own lets you save your effort for the more important elements of world creation.

For example, Blackmere featured its own small pantheon of gods, none of which matched the list in the *Player's Handbook*. So Avandra and Erathis became Seth, the redeemed god of travel and fortune, and Metron, the patron of civilization: sons of Altius Highfather, god of the sun, sky, and creation (a renamed Pelor). Many other gods came over to Blackmere unchanged. They were always there, it's just that they weren't important in the region where the characters adventured in the first campaign.

That leads us to retroactive continuity, sometimes called "retcon" by fans. This is where you, the DM, say, "This change I'm making was always true, and either your characters just didn't know it or we're simply agreeing to ignore any memories of another version of reality." You probably do this in D&D games all the time: remember when Kevin wasn't around when the party went through that portal to the Elemental Chaos, but when the next session started with him at the table his warlock Skarakas was somehow there with the group ready to adventure? You probably said something like, "We'll just pretend that Skarakas was around last time but didn't do anything important." That's retroactive continuity, and it just helped the group have more fun.

So when I told the players that the crumbling empire of Tarsis, which they all knew about in the first campaign but which never came into play, was once ruled by tieflings until their infernal bargains turned sour, I was introducing a retcon that let me fold a renamed Bael Turath into my campaign's past.

In another case, an element of the Blackmere world actually (and unintentionally) presaged a change introduced in the *Player's Handbook*, letting me easily explain the new eladrin presence. The elves of Blackmere were, for the most part, forest people cut off from the human world. But their legends told of the ancient times when tall, pale-skinned elves walked the world in grandeur and grace. One of the player characters even learned that he was descended from those elves and manifested strange fey powers throughout the campaign. These pale elves retroactively (and easily) became the eladrin, and their sudden and unexpected return to the world allowed me to set up significant themes in the new Blackmere campaign.

The last trick I used, a significant time shift, allowed me to solve another problem with the new campaign: How do I make the game friendly to the newer players who didn't participate in the original campaign while still retaining enough familiar world elements for the veterans? Pushing the timeline ahead several centuries was the answer I settled on, and it allowed me to kill multiple birds with the same stone.

By establishing that everything from the original campaign occurred in the distant (but still vaguely remembered and/or recorded) past, I didn't need to worry about the long shadows cast by the previous group of player characters. They could become occasionally mentioned historical figures, letting those players bask in a moment of memorable glory, but nobody would ask, "Why don't we just go get Duran and Jarvis to solve this problem for us?"

This also allowed me to create reasons that the current world didn't look exactly like the one the veterans remembered. In Blackmere, the dragonborn race became a new arrival on the scene, the first settlers of Arkhosia created by the paladin/dragon disciple Alarion after he retired from adventuring. This glorious but short-lived kingdom collapsed after war with Bael Turath—I mean Tarsis—and the dragonborn scattered across the lands. Even the kingdom of Blackmere itself crumbled and splintered, echoing the descriptions of the human kingdom of Nerath.

As I write this column, the characters in the new Blackmere campaign—I say campaigns, since we have three groups operating in the same world simultaneously—are approaching the paragon tier. They've explored new, until-now-untouched regions of the campaign world, as well as revisiting some familiar locales and seeing the changes that time has wrought. They've learned how their past characters' actions have shaped the present while still feeling that their current characters rule their own fates. Before too long, one group might just meet a very familiar face. (I can't say any more; some of them are reading this column!)

They've even explored a renamed Shadowfell Keep and the "actual" Thunderspire Labyrinth; not in or near anywhere called Nentir Vale, but that's what makes the flexible world of D&D so useful to the Dungeon Master.

Iomandra in the D&D World

Christopher Perkins

Like Andy, my campaign plays out with multiple groups, but unlike Andy, I didn't face the hurdle of re-imagining an existing campaign. I built my 4th Edition campaign from scratch.

My decade-long 3rd Edition campaign came to an end in 2007, by which time I already had the basic premise of my first 4th Edition campaign. Iomandra would be an ocean world dotted with hundreds of islands, each one with a story to tell. By happy coincidence, this premise mirrored the "points of light" concept of the 4th Edition core world—the notion of safe havens surrounded by darkness. Replace "darkness" with "the Dragon Sea," and you have it! I was hooked on the notion of a nautical campaign in which the heroes sailed from one island to the next, from one adventure to the next, à la Star Trek. Every island would have its own character, and the journey between islands could be uneventful or fraught with pirates and other perils.

Like James and Andy, I felt an instinctive urge to assimilate as many "core world" ideas as possible: the dragonborn empire of Arkhosia; the fallen tiefling kingdom of Bael Turath; Cendriane, the lost eladrin refuge; Gar Morra; Nerath. To each of these, I added my own flourish or twist.

For example, after deciding that dragons were critical elements of the campaign world—that nearly every island on the Dragon Sea had a dragon overlord of some sort—I realized that I could do great things with the dragonborn. So, instead of casting Arkhosia into the mists of time, I made it a dying empire gasping its last breath. Nerath became Bael Nerath, the sister empire of Bael Turath. I fell in love with the idea of two human kingdoms that were twisted reflections of one another, one utterly corrupted and destroyed (giving rise to the debased tieflings), the other reduced to a pale shadow of its former glory (giving rise to the divisive human baronies). Cendriane became the sequestered fey empire that fled the world to escape annihilation. Gar Morra remained as the last great stronghold of the dwarves, albeit a sundered one.

I adopted the core 4th Edition pantheon of gods partly out of laziness and partly because I couldn't have created a better one. I had more important things to do besides tinker with deities. Again, given the prominence of dragons, I decided to elevate Bahamut and Tiamat above the other gods—hardly a stroke of brilliance on my part.

The planes were mostly an afterthought. I had always assumed that the heroes would make occasional forays to the planes, yet the campaign would remain firmly grounded on Iomandra. The world map that I drew for my players incorporated mysteries and challenges at every tier, including epic tier: the Black Curtain, the Demonmaw Sargasso, the Eye of Io. For this reason, I left the planes mostly untouched. I also knew fairly early on that I would be the managing editor for the *Manual of the Planes*, so I was content to wait for that book to land on my desk before making any calls about the planes and their role in my campaign.

As of this writing, I have yet to find a place for the Nentir Vale in the world of Iomandra, having decided early on to begin the campaign on a backwater island in the heart of Arkhosian waters. Nentir Vale wasn't even a glimmer in Rich Baker's eye by the time I'd built the "hub" for my heroic-tier campaign. The *Dungeon Master's Guide* hadn't been written yet, and by the time the Nentir Vale appeared in print, I was well on my way. Still, I like the town of Fallcrest and can imagine several likely locations for the Nentir Vale. Perhaps it lies in the baronies of Bael Nerath, or maybe it was "phased" into the Feywild long ago and remains there still. For now, I'll keep it in my proverbial pocket.

For more information on the world of Iomandra, check out the Iomandra campaign wiki.

About the Authors

James Wyatt, **Andy Collins**, and **Chris Perkins** are actually one horrible creature—a three-headed chimera that lairs in the offices of Wizards of the Coast. Individually, they are referred to as the Dragon, the Lion, and the Goat, respectively.